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UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

MEANINGS OF TOUCH IN FORGIVENESS FOR SIX CHRISTIANS

by

SHANN RAY FERCH

A Thesis

submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

IN

COUNSELLING PSYCHOLOGY

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATIONAL PSYCHOLOGY

EDMONTON, ALBERTA

SPRING, 1996

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Dr. Steen Halling, External Member
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Nov 27/95

DEDICATION

To my mother and father

Tom and Sandy

To my wife's parents

Fred and Susie

and

to my wife

Jennifer

Your touch has illumined my way.

Romans 8:38-39

ABSTRACT

This study is an inquiry into the meaning and significance of touch in love relationships in the context of forgiveness. The primary data was gathered from six "Christian" subjects. For the purposes of this study, love relationships are defined as meaningful relationships in which love is expected, desired, or hoped for. A history of human touch as expressed in literature is explored, and a discussion of the current literature on forgiveness is engaged. The aim of this inquiry is to interpret the experience of touch in one specific context of love relationships: forgiveness. The appropriateness of the hermeneutic phenomenological approach to this research is discussed, as well as the foundations of this approach as shown in classic phenomenological writings. A methodology of hermeneutic phenomenology (as presented by van Manen (1990)) is outlined, and the dangers inherent to researcher bias are presented. Individual narrative descriptions of the experience of touch in love relationships in the context of forgiveness are presented and text revealing thematic elements of this experience is included. In conclusion, clinical, theoretical, and research implications, the author's experience of the hermeneutic phenomenological approach, and limitations of the study are examined.

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I thank you, Jennifer, for your tenderness and strength throughout the length of this research. Thank you for talks past midnight, for the intensity of your will and your intelligence, for the humility of your voice and the vision of your heart, for a note of love written on a napkin, and for your own choice over a decade ago to forgive when it was undeserved.

Finally, I want to thank those who participated in the interviews that make up the body of this research. I thank you by the names chosen to honor you--Joshua, Sarah, John, Joseph, Peter, and Miriam. Your willingness to give of your own private and often painful world so shamelessly and so courageously is an irrevocable treasure. Stories from your lives are recorded here and they speak to the intimacy, the humility, and the bravery of humanity.

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CHAPTER 1

THE FOUNDATION FROM WHICH THE QUESTION RISES

"True philosphy consists in re-learning to look at the world, and in this sense a historical account can give meaning to the world quite as 'deeply' as a philosophical treatise."
(Merleau-Ponty, 1962, p. xx)

Introduction

Touch is an experience fundamental to humanity. From the enfolding touch experienced in the womb to the touch of another's hand before death, touch accompanies, reflects, and speaks to the reality of our lives. Touch is among the most meaningful ways we come to experience and know our world and in the context of meaningful relationships touch communicates in ways that are completely unique.

The study described here focused on the question: What is the lived experience of touch as it coincides with forgiveness in love relationships? The study investigated the nature of touch as it is experienced in the context of forgiveness in love relationships.

The research design proposed by the hermeneutic phenomenological perspective (van Manen, 1990) was followed during this study. Thus the narrative or descriptive personal experience of individuals was gathered through a systematic process of written descriptions and in-depth interviews. The lived experience of individuals formed the basis from which experiential meanings of touch in the context of forgiveness were explored. Phenomenological methodology is a productive approach to researching the meaning issues associated with lived experience (Sartre, 1956; Merleau-Ponty, 1962; Husserl, 1970; Heidegger, 1982), and as such it provided a legitimate framework from which to complete the study.

The study was also founded in my own personal and clinical experience. When I was nine years old my parents divorced for approximately one year. Through a number of unique circumstances my mother and father were remarried to each other. The forgiveness that took place in their marriage and in our family moved me and helped to form much of my young view of the world. The life experience of individuals, families, and children in both formal and informal counselling have also moved me and taught me the value and strength of forgiveness.

Forgiveness was not the exclusive focus of this study, but rather the lived experience of touch in the context of forgiveness within love relationships--relationships which are meaningful and in which love is desired, expected, or hoped for. With this in mind, it is beneficial to explore the history of human touch, and human touch in relationships.

A history of the significance of touch in meaningful relationships

Both Plato, in the fourth century B.C., and Aristotle, in the third century B.C., described how touch differs from the other senses. Each philosopher stated that with the other senses a specific organ conveys the sense to us: eyes for sight, ears for hearing, etc.; yet with touch, there is no specifically correlated organ. In *De Anima*, Aristotle states "we are unable clearly to detect in the case of touch what the single subject is which... corresponds to sound in the case of hearing" (1941, p. 25). Aristotle did not see flesh as the organ of touch. Rather, he saw it as the medium of touch, implying that the organ of touch is not the skin or the flesh, but the soul or the heart, or something that lies deep within us. In *De Anima*, Aristotle also connects that deep part of us with the tactile nature of touch: "the soul is analogous to the hand; for as the hand is the tool of tools, so the mind is the form of forms" (p. 98).

Touch has been investigated for over 20 centuries, yet the lived significance of touch remains largely unknown. The meaning of touch in love relationships is especially elusive.

Frederick II, emperor of Germany (1194 to 1250), commanded the first known experiments on the significance of touch. Frederick II wanted to find out what language a child would speak as an adult if no one spoke to the child beforehand. In his desire to learn he discovered, tragically, the importance of touch in the childhood years.

> ... he bade foster mothers and nurses to suckle the children, to bathe and wash them, but in no way to prattle with them, for he wanted to learn whether they would speak the Hebrew language, which was the oldest, or Greek, or Latin, or Arabic, or perhaps the language of their parents, of whom they had been born. But he laboured in vain because the children all died. For they could not live without the petting and joyful faces and loving words of their foster mothers. And so the songs are called 'swaddling songs' which a woman sings while she is rocking the cradle, to put the child to sleep, and without them a child sleeps badly and has no rest. (Salimbene (13th century), in Montagu, 1986, pp. 102-103)

To swaddle, or swathe, is to envelop. A mother sings swaddling songs to wrap or envelop her child in security, comfort, safety, peace. Touch can be viewed in a similar light. At times we touch those we love to envelop them in our love. Touch is vital to us from the first moments of life.

Plato and Aristotle set touch apart from the other senses. Frederick II revealed the importance of touch to early development. But the Renaissance gave us images of touch as power.

> In his fresco masterpiece, The Creation of Man (Sistine Chapel, Vatican), Michelangelo has God stretch out a dynamic hand toward the lifeless hand of Adam in order to transmit the spark of life to it. This vision of touch as the bearer of vital energy is an interesting variation on Genesis, where God directly breathes Adam into life. By contrast, Michelangelo's God uses touch. (Weber, in Bernard and Brazelton, 1990, p. 16)

Touch is significant to us, but *what* is its significance? What meaning do we take from touch when we are touched in forgiveness?

Early pediatricians such as Bakwin (1949) recognized the importance of touch to infants. Bakwin believed that the skin sensations and the kinesthetic sense were important for the young baby. Babies are soothed by tender touch and warmth, and they cry when irritated or exposed to cold. Bakwin postulated that the quieting effect of keeping babies outdoors, under the right conditions, may be a result of the movement of the air on the skin.

As children we are soothed by touch. Touch speaks of our aliveness, our being, our existence. When we touch another, we touch that which represents an "objective reality" or a living and breathing something that is not us, that is other than us, that is outside us... literally, we touch an 'other'. Yet as we touch this objective other we not only find that they exist, but so do we. For touch is not one way. When we feel the other we feel ourselves. Maybe we mark the discovery of the self in touching another, and begin the development of this self by our tactile relation to others, to the physical presence outside ourselves. Walter Ong, in*The Presence of the Word*, stated it clearly:

> And yet, by the very fact that it attests the not me more than any other sense, touch involves my own subjectivity more than any other sense. When I feel this objective something 'out there', beyond the bounds of my body, I also at the same instant experience my own self. I feel other and self simultaneously.
> (1967, pp. 169-170)

In *Being and Nothingness* (1956) Sartre says we caress our own body when we caress another. For Sartre, touch is like *the look*, it appropriates others, it is of one direction, it tells us of our own being. Again, the self is discovered, commented on, given opportunity to develop. Merleau-Ponty postulated that touch is not of one direction only, but reciprocal. He stated: "In the very act of touching, one is touched in return" (1962, p. 322). For Merleau-Ponty, we cannot touch without being touched ourselves. Thus, Merleau-Ponty, like Aristotle and Plato, sets touch apart from the other senses. We can hear and not be heard, we can see and not be seen, but touch is reciprocal. We cannot

touch without being touched in return. "To touch or to be touched implies to be close to what is touched.... In touch, the distinction between touching subject and touching object blurs" (p. 323). Is it possible that the discovery of the self coincides with positive tactile experience between us and others?

Chamfort said, "Love as it exists in society is merely the mingling of two fantasies and the contact of two skins" (1969, p. 170). If this is true, touch in love relationships takes on increased value. Touch in love, or in meaningful relationships, opens possibilities of belief, acceptance, care, healing. Touch in love relationships may be curative, healing. Touch from one loved one to another may be therapeutic, in the original Greek sense of the word. Weber, in *A Philosophical Perspective on Touch*, defines the therapeutic nature of touch:

> *Therapeueia* means to take care of, and its humanistic roots are preserved in the word itself, for *therapon* meant an attendant, a living person. Thus "*therapeutic*", which today signifies "curative, having healing qualities," derives from the care shown to one person by another, the therapon or healing presence.
> (Weber, in Barnard and Brazelton, 1990, p. 28)

The therapeutic value of touch in love relationships may play a meaningful role in the significance of touch: "Because of its calm, soothing, and noninvasive nature, therapeutic touch can be used from the moment the neonate emerges into the world and throughout the life spectrum, from infancy through maturity to old age. Since it communicates without words, it may be especially appropriate with the terminally ill and dying, whom it can envelop in an affirming atmosphere even in the absence of language" (p. 31).

In the history of psychology, touch has been addressed by many writers; both G. Stanley Hall (1891) and Sigmund Freud (1905) proposed that the mouth is an important starting point of human psychological development. Among the most touch sensitive parts of the body are the fingertips, the tongue, and the lips. Hall believed that in early life our mouth

gains a tactile pleasure from bringing smooth things to the lips and hard things to the toothless gums. Freud wrote: "It was the child's first and most vital activity, his sucking at his mother's breast... that must have familiarized him with this pleasure (of rhythmic sucking). The child's lips... behave like an erotogenic zone, and no doubt stimulation by the warm flow of milk is the cause of the pleasurable sensation" (p. 60).

Montagu, in *Touching: the Human Significance of the Skin*, furthered this view of the mouth as the region through which we first respond to touch. "It is in the region surrounding the mouth that the human embryo first responds to tactile stimulation. It is not surprising, therefore, to find that the first communications with the outside world are established by the infant through the lips..." (1986, p. 121).

The animal studies of Frank (1957) and Harlow (1958) increased our understanding of the significance of touch. Frank found that rats which were handled gently were able to metabolize food better, were less susceptible to invasive surgical shock than other rats, and were found to be gentle animals in general. Rats that were not handled gently were more excitable and fearful.

In an important experiment on the significance of touch, Harlow revealed the need for young mammals to experience touch from the outset of life. He found that when baby monkeys were raised in a bare wire-mesh cage, the monkeys survived with difficulty, or did not survive at all. The baby monkeys did better when a wire mesh cone was introduced. And finally, baby monkeys thrived and were healthy and husky if the wire mesh cone was covered with terry cloth, thus making contact comfort a significant variable. Harlow reported that "contact comfort is a variable of overwhelming importance in the development of affectional responses" (1958, p. 676).

Under touch deprivation Rhesus monkeys die at a much lower rate than humans. The more primitive the animal the less the consequences of touch deprivation. Thus the human infant suffers the effects of touch deprivation quicker and more profoundly than the infant monkey. Nevertheless, the experiments of Harlow parallel those of Frederick II in demonstrating the devastation of touch deprivation. Touch deprivation promotes deficiencies that seriously effect the development of the self. In the presence of contact comfort, baby humans, like baby monkeys, are allowed to "move on" as long as other conditions such as nutrition, sleep, and good health are met.

Montagu (1971) echoed Harlow's findings: "The manner in which the young of all mammals struggle and cuddle against the body of the mother... strongly suggests that cutaneous stimulation is an important biological need for both their physical and their behavioral development. Almost every animal enjoys being stroked or otherwise having the skin pleasurably stimulated" (p. 28). Montagu goes on to connect this thought to specifically human development. "To be tender, loving and caring, human beings must be tenderly loved and cared for in their earliest years..." (p. 121).

Mead (1951) reports how children in Bali are constantly held, carried, touched. She relates that when the child is bathed is one of the few times in the first five or six months of its life that it is not in someone's arms. "So the child learns life within human arms. It learns to eat, with the exception of the experience of being fed in its bath, to laugh, to play, to listen, to watch, to dance, to feel frightened or relaxed, in human arms" (p. 42-43). To Balinese children touch is an irrevocable element of life. Touch is an appropriate and familiar life experience. They can always return to "the known arms of parents and siblings, where fright and comfort, interest and sleep, have already been experienced. Bodies are always there, other people's bodies to lean against, to huddle together with, to sleep beside" (p. 50).

After World War II, in part because of the pioneer work of René Spitz, the relationship between touch and infant development was better understood. Spitz (1965) confirmed that when infants are not touched for long periods of time, they deteriorate. Researching in a hospital for abandoned babies and babies whose mothers were in prison, Spitz found that though the infants were well-fed and kept in a highly sanitary environment, they had a high death rate as a result of a disease called marasmus; a wasting away with no apparent medical cause. In Mexico, Spitz investigated an orphanage in which conditions were unsanitary, but babies were happier, more alert, and did not cry as much. He proposed that the condition of the babies may have been helped by women who came in from the village each day to sing and talk to them. As they talked and sang, they rocked and held the babies. In later years, after World Wər II when thousands of orphans had to be cared for, Spitz observed that touched babies were not deficient in growth, while those who were left alone in bassinets often became ill and developed profound growth deficiencies and intellectual defects.

Spitz' research on children who experienced partial emotional deprivation, reported that "recovery is prompt when the love object is returned to the child within a period of three to five months" (1965, p. 277). However, in cases of total emotional deprivation Spitz discovered that "if one deprives children during their first year of all object relations for periods lasting longer than five months, they will show the symptoms of increasingly serious deteriorations, which appears to be, in part at least, irreversible" (1965, p.277). Spitz observed total deprivation and its consequences in a foundling home which housed 91 infants. Here, children were breast-fed for their first three months by their mother, or by a surrogate mother ("wet-nurse"). During these three months the infants demonstrated the developmental level of normal children of the same city. After the third month the children were separated from their mothers. In the foundling home they were adequately

cared for in every bodily respect: food, hygiene, medical care, medication, etc.. However, only one nurse was given to care for eight to twelve children. In the words of Spitz, the children were "emotionally starved" (p. 278). Spitz felt the infants received about one tenth of the normal affective attention provided in the usual mother-child relationship. After the separation the infants deteriorated progressively, motor retardation became fully evident, the children became completely passive, lying still in their cots, incapable to exert enough motor control to turn to the prone position. Of the 91 children observed in the Foundling Home, 34 died by the end of the second year. The children who survived showed a progressive decline in development, explicitly stated in Spitz' comment that "by the end of the second year, the average of their developmental quotients stands at 45 per cent of the normal. This would be the level of the idiot. We continued to observe these children at longer intervals up to the age of four years ...by that time, with a few exceptions, these children cannot sit, stand, walk, or talk" (p. 278).

Spitz went on to describe the absence of mothering, in essence the absence of physical affection, as equal to emotional starvation and a deprivation that leads to progressive deterioration. First the child's psychological development is arrested, then psychological dysfunctions and somatic changes set in. Increased susceptibility to infection follows, and finally, if emotional deprivation goes into the second year of life, the result is "a spectacularly increased rate of mortality" (p. 281).

In an echo of the need for touch, researchers found that hospitalization, caring, and feeding by nurturant adults improved the condition of children who failed to thrive (Powell, Brasel, and Blizzard, 1967). The importance of touching in the mothering process in humans is reflected in the studies of Spitz and Powell et al., as well as in more recent research endeavors (Klaus, Kennel, Plumb, and Zuchike, 1970; Montagu, 1971; Trevathan, 1981; Colton, 1983; de Ajuriaguerra, 1989; Stack and Muir, 1990).

It is now generally accepted that when infants are not touched for an extended period of time, they deteriorate both physically and mentally. It is also known that if they are touched and caressed they have a much better chance of normal development. But skills, abilities and aptitudes are not necessarily maximized by the presence of touch. The infant must be caressed, fondled and stroked, but when we touch and caress a child we do not necessarily make them feel loved; we may just be keeping them from feeling unloved. Touch may be important not only for its benefits, but also for its ability to prevent deterioration. Touch appears elemental to our species requirements.

Phenomenological literature

Historically, touch has been discussed, painted, sculpted, drawn, experimented on, and written about. But what is the lived experience of touch in the specific act of forgiveness? This was the explorative question of this study. I am interested in the human experience of touch in love relationships. Touch is a human experience of unclear significance. Quantitative psychology is not equipped to explore the meaning or essence of the lived experience of touch in love relationships. Touch is a human experience which is both common and mysterious, it is *everyday* yet at the same time it transcends the mundane. Thus, in its mystery and complexity the lived experience of touch in the context of forgiveness requires an approach based in human science in order to accurately reflect the personal meaning of such an experience.

Because of its emphasis on human experience as lived, phenomenology provided an ideal starting point for an inquiry into the meaning of the lived experience of touch in forgiveness.

> The phenomenologists' insistence on the careful description of ordinary conscious experience is partly motivated by their sense that previous philosophers have either ignored this altogether, or described it in an inaccurate or misleading fashion. (Hammond, Howarth, and Keat, 1991, p. 3)

Edmond Husserl, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, and Jean-Paul Sartre have all written of the significance of human experience in the discovery of meaning or knowledge. In his *Cartesian Meditations* Husserl established experience as a means of gaining knowledge of the lived world, or the world in which we live:

> Anything belonging to the world, any spatio-temporal being, exists for me--that is to say, is accepted by me--in that I experience it, perceive it, remember it, think of it somehow, judge about it, desire it, or the like. (1977, p. 21)

Merleau-Ponty, in *Phenomenology of Perception*, refers to the writings of Husserl in speaking of phenomenology both as a philosophy which is based in human experience, and one which transcends the traditional role of science due to its orientation toward human experience in understanding the world. Merleau-Ponty explains phenomenology as:

> ... a matter of describing, not of explaining or analyzing. Husserl's first directive to phenomenology, in its early stages, to be a 'descriptive psychology', or to return to the 'things themselves', is from the start a foreswearing of science. I am not the outcome of the meeting-point of numerous causal agencies which determine my bodily or psychological make-up. I cannot conceive myself as nothing but a bit of the world, a mere object of biological, psychological or sociological investigation. I cannot shut myself up within the realm of science. All my knowledge of the world, even my scientific knowledge, is gained from my own particular point of view, or from some experience of the world without which the symbols of science would be meaningless. (1962, p. viii)

Sartre too, wrote of lived experience as it pertains to meaning and knowledge of the world. "... Sartre, like Merleau-Ponty, concentrates on providing detailed descriptions of the experience of subjects in the world, where these descriptions make explicit that these subjects are temporal, are bodily, are involved in situations, have histories, and so on" (Hammond, Howarth and Keat, 1991, pp. 264-265). Stated simply, Sartre described

human experience to gain understanding of the world. In *Being and Nothingness*, Sartre illustrates the phenomenological stance that knowledge is gained from lived experience:

> ... the tree escapes me and repulses me, and I can no more lose myself in the tree than it can dissolve itself in me. I'm beyond it; it's beyond me. ... our consciousness of things is by no means limited to knowledge of them. Knowledge, or pure 'representation', is only one of the possible forms of my consciousness 'of' this tree; I can also love it, fear it, hate it. ...So it is that all at once hatred, love, fear, sympathy--all these famous 'subjective' reactions which were floating in the malodorous brine of the mind--are pulled out. They are merely ways of discovering the world. It is things which abruptly unveil themselves to us as hateful, sympathetic, horrible, lovable.
>
> ...Outside, in the world, among others. It is not in some hiding-place that we will discover ourselves, it is on the road, in the town, in the midst of the crowd, a thing among things, a man among men.
> (1956, pp. iv,v)

So also with the human experience of touch. We discover its meaning or significance "on the road, in the town, in the midst of a crowd." We discover the meaning of touch in our lived experience of it.

The importance of touch to early human growth and development is no longer disputed. It is clear that infants need touch to avoid growth deterioration. Touch appears to be a vital element in the development of a self. Yet the significance of *specific kinds* of touch remains unclear. How does touch during a moment of forgiveness act as a component of the development of the self? What is the lived meaning of the forgiving touch? It was my goal to interpret the significance of touch in love relationships through the specific life experience of forgiveness.

I am concerned with touch in significant or meaningful relationships. For the purpose of this study I have called such relationships "love relationships"; relationships in which love is expected, desired, or hoped for. Touch itself can be both tactile and emotional. Tactile touch, physical touch from one person to another in the context of the love relationship, is the primary focus of the study, and the emotional side of touch cannot be eliminated. "I

was touched," we say, or "You touched me," and the metaphorical nature of our words becomes self-evident. When we are emotionally moved we say we are "touched," though a physical touch may not have occurred. In the present study I inquire into the physical experience of touch; the emotional nature of touching is necessarily a part of this, an inherent element that cannot and should not be extracted. I inquire into the significance of touch in love relationships. Thus the actual experience of touch in love relationships serves as the foundation for my inquiry.

History itself speaks to the inherent meaning found in forgiveness. The role of forgiveness on a world scale can be found in the aftermath of war, in the overcoming of racism, and in the establishment of peace among peoples. The Amerian civil rights movement as well as the current history of South Africa, Israel, Palestine, and Croatia point to the global need for and value of forgiveness. More specifically, upon reviewing my personal and clinical experience of touch, I have found the theme of forgiveness to be vital. Globally, as well as interpersonally, it appears that forgiveness and loving touch are necessary for the growth of humanity. It is understood that throughout history forgiveness is present on an international scale. It is also understood that throughout the history of interpersonal relationships forgiveness is present. This study focuses on the forgiveness seen interpersonally, and specifically in meaningful or significant interpersonal relationships referred to in this document as love relationships.

I am not trying to investigate love as a whole, the vastness of the topic alone calls for research limits. Just to describe a specific form of love such as spirtitual love, platonic love, romantic love or erotic love could fill a dissertation. Rather, I want to inquire into a specific portion of love. I am not interested in the role of touch in such love situations as comforting, being together, consoling, arousing, etc., though these forms of touch may

come up in the research process. In this study I investigate the role of touch in one specific love situation: when we feel we have forgiven another or have been forgiven ourselves.

There are times when a breech has occurred between oneself and a loved one. We may go through a process of forgiveness, and eventually we may seal this forgiveness with an embrace, a touch of the hand, a kiss or some other form of touch. In this study I investigated the experience of 6 "Christian"[1] subjects to explore the lived meaning of touch in forgiveness.

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[1] The particular denomination of each participant is recognized at the end of Chapter 2. A description of my relationship to the participants prior to this study is also provided.

BACKGROUND OF THE QUESTION

Touch

A man taps the person in front of him on the shoulder; "What time is it?" he asks. After a sermon, a churchgoer shakes the hand of a preacher. An adult grabs the hand of a child and pries out a plastic toy the child was about to put in his mouth. A man enters his workplace, shaking hands with co-workers as he makes his way to his desk. A dentist shakes a patient's hand as she takes the dental chair. At the end of a session, a counsellor puts her hand on her client's shoulder, "Take care," she says. A doctor touches a patient's arm, "How are you feeling today," she says. A boy grabs another boy's arm to keep him from stealing his candy bar. A young girl pulls the fringe of her teacher's coat to get him to hear her request.

We use touch in numerous ways: to get someone's attention; to say "Well done"; to protect; to greet; to comfort or soothe; to communicate good wishes; to defend ourselves; to make some kind of connection, positive or negative, between us and someone else. Touch in everyday relations serves many purposes, but it is often different than touch in love relationships. As we touch strangers or acquaintances or neighbors or co-workers, touch communicates and helps us function socially with those around us. But does it communicate with the same meaning that touch can convey in love relationships?

Touch in love relationships

A mother reaches to her son, pulling him close by holding his arms in her hands, making eye contact with him; "I like your smile," she says; "Thank you, Mommy," he replies. A boy rides home with his father; the boy hangs his head in silence; the father notices, turns

to him and puts a hand on his shoulder, "You will soar to great heights one day, Son," he says. An older brother embraces his younger brother after a heart to heart talk. A wife kisses her husband when he enters the room. A sister holds her brother's hand; she is ten years older than him, married now, and hasn't had the chance to be with him as he grows up: "I miss you, John," she says and begins to cry. A woman places a hand on the hand of her daughter; "Will you forgive me," she says, "I was wrong to treat you that way." A wife turns to her husband, she takes his face in her hands, she embraces him as he weeps.

Encouraging, empathizing, caring, forgiving: is this what it is to touch in love relationships? When we use positive touch in love relationships, do we touch merely to encourage, empathize with, care for, and forgive others? Do we touch in love relationships to establish love as a stronghold for us and another? As we touch those we love, we want them to know we love them, we forgive them, we believe in them, we see them as valuable. But is this all there is to the touch? Can it not also be said that we touch to know we are loved, we are forgiven, we are believed in, and we are seen as valuable? We can say to a loved one, "I love you," and we can look in a mirror and tell ourselves we are forgiven; but sometimes this is not enough. And so we touch. What is it that sets touch apart from speech, or the written word, or a look, or a wave of the hand?

Liz's story

As a counsellor I witness touch in love relationships, and hear first hand accounts of instances when this touch occurred. I will not forget the story of one young woman who told me how touch moved her. Liz was 21 when I saw her. At age four she had found her mother dead in a pool of blood in the bathroom. Her father remarried. Her step-mother gave her drugs from age five to seven, often laughing at the effects on her young step-child. Also from age five to seven, Liz was sexually abused by her step-brother. "Drugs

and alcohol were everywhere," she said, "there was no control; the home was totally chaotic." Around this time, her grandparents sought to gain custody of her. Her father and step-mother moved away to evade this. But the police succeeded in taking her away from her father and step-mother to let her live with her grandparents. "This was one of the first happy days of my life," she said. Even so, Liz did not experience loving touch with her grandparents. They loved her, but physical affection was given rarely or not at all. No touch to say, "I love you. I value you." The chaos continued: when Liz was eight, her father died in a drug-related shooting.

Life went on for Liz; she went to high school, she made some friends, she drank heavily, and she had a difficult time believing in herself, or in life. Finally, she met a family that took her in. She lived with them for a year during her first year of college. They loved her deeply. They respected her. They believed in Jesus Christ and in time she came to accept this belief as her own. She related to me the first time she remembers experiencing loving touch:

"In this family, the parents and the children gather in the parents' bedroom at night to talk about the day, and to pray, and just to be together. I had been living in the home for about six months, but I had never joined them at the parents' bedside. On this night I had just had a long, difficult talk with a friend, and the family knew about it. I came upstairs to go to bed. The door to the parents' bedroom was open a bit, so I peeked in. 'Come on in,' said Alexandria (mom), 'how did the talk go?' I was so scared. My hands were cold and sweaty, and I just stood there for awhile. You see, when I grew up, you never went into the parents' bedroom. And if you did, you got screamed at until you got out. I still remember my dad screaming at me. So I stood there with my head peeking in their room, and my hands sweating. 'Come on in,' said Alexandria again, and she motioned me closer. I walked in the room, very scared. The family made room for me and I laid there

next to Alexandria, stiff as a board, as close to the edge of the bed as possible. 'So tell us what happened,' said Alexandria. I began to relax a little and I told my story. As I was talking, she reached over and held my hand. The touch said that she loved me deeply, and accepted me. It was healing."

Why *touch* in love relationships?

In light of Liz's story, it appears possible that a person can live in a family for nearly twenty years and *never* experience a loving touch. Not five times, or three times. Not even once. Certainly this is an extreme example, but one that draws me to look at love relationships and inquire into the experience of the loving touch. What is it that makes touch in love relationships so powerful? What is the essence of the touch that tells us we are loved? What is the essence of the touch that conveys we are forgiven? What is the experience of this touch in love relationships? Liz and a number of my clients, friends and family members have revealed to me the pressing need to pursue this question. Some have said touch was a missing factor in their relationships, some have said touch was ever-present. And for some it fell somewhere in between. But all have said that when they experienced loving touch in relationships of depth, it deeply moved them.

A discussion of forgiveness in current literature

The distinction of "Human" Science versus "Natural" Science is often attributed to Wilhelm Dilthey. Dilthey developed the contrast between the *Naturwisseshaften* (the natural or physical sciences) and the *Geisteswissenschaften* into a methodological program for the latter. For Dilthey the proper subject matter for the *Geisteswissenschaften* is the human world characterized by *Geist*--mind, thoughts, consciousness, values, feelings, emotions, actions, and purposes, which find their objectifications in languages, beliefs, arts, and institutions. Thus, at the risk of oversimplification one might say that the difference between natural science and human science resides in what it studies: natural science studies "objects of nature," "things," "natural events," and "the way that objects behave." Human science, in contrast, studies "persons," or beings that have "consciousness" and that "act purposefully" in and on the world by creating objects of "meaning" that are "expressions" of how human beings exist in the world.

(van Manen, 1990, pp 3-4)

Natural science

...natural science studies "objects of nature," "things," "natural events," and "the way that objects behave."

(van Manen, 1990, p.3)

Though natural science has undertaken to research forgiveness in multiple ways, the current avenues chosen have primarily been in the areas of theory, case studies, and recommended means of incorporating the use of forgiveness as a therapeutic intervention. More empirical forms of research on forgiveness remain largely unused. One possibility for this absence of critical evidence may be the difficulty of holding the construct of forgiveness within the hard and fast confines of experimental research. Such a limited amount of critical inquiry into the human experience of forgiveness may point to the inadequacy of empirical science to uncover the meaning of forgiveness. In any case, though the body of current literature on forgiveness is vast, the body of controlled research on this topic remains almost non-existent. Even so, current literature on forgiveness does provide insight into the role of the experience of forgiveness in therapeutic process and as such proves to be an appropriate foundational element from which the question of the present research study rises.

Current research on forgiveness can be grouped into thirteen areas of application to therapeutic psychology:

1) animal studies on forgiveness

2) forgiveness scales

3) stage theories of forgiveness and forgiveness in pre-existing stage theories

4) therapeutic models of forgiveness

5) therapist skill at encouraging forgiveness in clients

6) religious approaches: predominantly Christian or Biblical in the current literature

7) forgiveness in the healing of severe trauma

8) forgiveness in self-treatment and treatment of addictions

9) forgiveness as a coping mechanism in cancer, Alzheimer's, and aging

10) forgiveness in individual, marriage, and family therapy

11) forgiveness as essential in relieving psychologically debilitating emotions

12) self-forgiveness

13) factors contributing to the inability to forgive

Within such a varied literature, authors have deepened our view of forgiveness and broadened our understanding of its effectiveness as a therapeutic intervention.

1) animal studies on forgiveness

Though it seems quite a leap to claim that reconciliation in monkeys and apes is the same as forgiveness, DeWaal (1989) suggests that such reconciliation supports his thesis that forgiveness and peacemaking occur in nonhuman primates. DeWaal proposes that these "forgiveness", "peacemaking" behaviors in nonhuman primates should encourage work in human conflict resolution. Godfray (1992) too, suggested that animal populations show forgiveness-like behaviors and proposed that natural selection favors simple rules of conduct that are likely to be more forgiving than conflictual.

2) forgiveness scales

In a study in which one scale was developed to measure forgiveness of others and one to measure forgiveness of self, researchers suggested that responses of a sample of 237 outpatient counselling clients showed that clients who scored with deficits on these two scales showed increased amounts of psychopathology such as depression, anxiety, and

negative self esteem on the Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory (Mauger, Perry, Freeman, Grove et al., 1992).

3) stage theories of forgiveness and forgiveness in pre-existing stage theories

Smedes (1984) proposed a four-stage theory of forgiveness involving hurt, hatred, healing, and coming together. In 1989, researchers tested a social cognitive stage model of forgiveness on 4th, 7th, and 10th graders and concluded that people's understanding of forgiveness increases with age (Enright, Santos, and Al-Mabuk). Rosenak and Harnden (1992) suggested a stage theory for specifically Christian therapists stating forgiveness includes four stages: hurt, anger, information seeking, and resolution. Finally, Hargrave (1994) proposed a conceptual "station" (stage) framework to help clients find a way to forgive after having suffered severe violations of love and trust in their intergenerational families.

Enwright, Sarinopoulos, Al-Mabuk, and Freedman (1992) proposed a moral development approach to forgiveness that draws mainly on the organismic or cognitive developmental approaches of Piaget and Kohlberg. The researchers stated there is a predictable stage sequence in forgiveness that suggests that the principle underlying forgiveness is love, and they proposed forgiveness is concerned with mercy or, more specifically, with giving a gift to one who has inflicted deep hurt. Enwright (1994) later argued that personal development may be advanced when forgiveness is the goal, and Powers (1994) provided a commentary on Piaget's view of the moral development of forgiveness and suggested that once revenge is rejected, forgiveness seems reasonable.

4) therapeutic models of forgiveness

Therapeutic models of forgiveness provide a wide base from which to examine the therapeutic value of forgiveness. Fitzgibbons (1986) described cognitive and emotive uses of forgiveness as a therapeutic technique that encourages patients to release anger without inflicting harm on others. In this study forgiveness is presented as an intervention that frees people from anger and guilt that is often the result of unconscious anger, and the process of working through forgiveness is discussed. Hope (1987) reviewed various steps in the process of forgiveness and the role of forgiveness as a strong therapeutic tool in psychological healing while Fortune (1988) suggested that the human desire to forgive is related to the hope that forgiveness will heal and resolve the pain of what we have experienced. Darby's (1989) study of children suggested that apology and ensuing forgiveness may be so engrained in human social life that the appearance of an apology automatically promotes forgiveness. Enright and Eastin et al. (1992) discussed aspects of therapy used to bring about forgiveness in clients, and described a model of interpersonal forgiveness as well as the benefits of interpersonal forgiveness. Finally, Kirkup (1993) provided guidelines for developing forgiveness and suggested that lasting peace in mediating conflict involves forgiveness. The study also proposed that a strong approach to forgiveness is not naive or cynical and that forgiveness requires hope which is the antidote to depression and despair.

Therapeutic models of forgiveness characterized by some integration of spirituality and psychology are also evidenced in current literature. McAllister (1983) suggested forgiveness is one of the needs humans strive to meet throughout their lives and proposed an integrated approach to therapy that joins psychology and theology. Wapnick (1985) presented forgiveness as a spiritual psychotherapy while Ritzman (1987) described forgiveness as a therapeutic element of particular power and importance and proposed the

nature of forgiveness is unconditional, always existent in relationships of genuine love and in relation to God, and necessary for the healing of deep emotional hurts. Pingleton (1989) also integrated spirituality with psychology when he discussed the nature and function of forgiveness from a theological stance as well as in an analysis of the dynamics of forgiveness from a psychological view.

Finally, therapeutic models of forgiveness in recent literature often include a discussion of forgiveness from the viewpoint of an existing theory or intervention structure. Todd (1985) examined the views of Jung concerning religious confession and forgiveness. Hibbs (1991) incorporated forgiveness as an element of contextual family theory and therapy and included a Christian dimension to his integration of forgiveness, theory, and therapy. Gartner (1992) discussed forgiveness in psychoanalytic therapy from a psychoanalytic object relations theory perspective, and Cloke (1993) encouraged the use of practical and creative interventions involving symbol, ritual, and storytelling to enable family members to forgive one another and initiate the healing process.

5) therapist skill at encouraging forgiveness in clients

Current investigations of therapist skill at encouraging forgiveness in clients suggest that therapist age and therapist ability to establish an accepting therapeutic alliance may be factors in successful use of forgiveness as an intervention. Benson (1992) suggested that unconditional acceptance by the therapist creates a climate to facilitate elements essential to the forgiveness process while DiBlasio (1992) reported that 90 clinicians over 45 years of age were stronger in the clinical implementation of forgiveness than 77 clinicians younger than 45 years of age. In 1993, DiBlasio and Benda proposed that therapists with more religious identification would be more effective in the clinical use of forgiveness but in a study published the same year DiBlasio and Proctor found that gender, education level, and

personal religiosity of marriage and family therapists showed no significant relationship to their level of clinical implementation of forgiveness.

6) religious approaches: predominantly Christian or Biblical in the current literature

The impact of Biblical approaches to forgiveness is widespread in current literature. Such approaches range from explorations of scripture to in-depth Biblical understanding of the concept of forgiveness to integration of Biblical thought with psychotherapy, and provide a unique look at forgiveness as an element of healing and therapy.

Explorations of Biblical text include an examination of the Sermon on the Mount and the role of forgiveness in Christian prosocial behavior (Williams, 1985-86) as well as an illustration of fatherhood and father-son relationships that speaks of Joseph as a man of political power and position who was betrayed by his brothers and yet was willing and able to forgive (Schwaber, 1988).

In-depth Biblical understanding of the concept of forgiveness covers a wide spectrum. Donelley (1984) discussed the teaching of Jesus on "limitless forgiveness" and promoted an assertive, confrontive model of forgiveness that encourages reconciliation in spirit. Enright and Zell (1989) presented suggestions through Biblical word analysis and reason for how counsellors may approach clients who ask subtle and difficult questions about forgiving someone who has injured them. Gladson (1992) proposed that the Old Testament lays the foundation for the doctrine of forgiveness, and that humanity has revolted against God and now lives in a state of spiritual alienation and only forgiveness can remove the barrier between God and humanity. The author also suggested that the Old Testament stance on the forgiveness of God was deepened by the Christ-event and gives the Christian therapist a powerful therapeutic resource. In addition, Zackrison (1992)

focused on the Adam-Christ typology and included discussion on the relational center of grace and forgiveness; the author proposed the grace of God as the source of forgiveness. Finally, integration of Biblical thought with psychological treatment is varied. Johnson (1984) outlined reconciliation counselling, a model that combines ideas of Christian thought and rehabilitation. In this model the author concludes that accepting the forgiveness of God enables people to reach out and allow friendship to be renewed. Young (1984) presented cases in which the therapist blended the Rational Emotive Therapy (RET) concept of acceptance with the Biblical principal of forgiveness to encourage individuals to take responsibility for their errors and work toward future corrective measures. Whipple (1988) discussed Biblical issues of concern to Christian battered women, specifically including forgiveness in the discussion while both Jagers (1989) and Worthington (1994) described Christian approaches to marriage counselling. Jagers' approach included confession and forgiveness as an integral part of marriage counselling; Worthington's approach was designed specifically for marriages torn by an affair and included the use of scripture passages and concepts.

7) forgiveness in the healing of severe trauma

Some current literature suggests that forgiveness is a vital element in the healing of severe trauma. Moss (1986), in a discussion emphasizing theories of Freud and Hegel, set forth both the human tendency to pursue revenge and to pursue forgiveness as strategies for removing the effects of trauma. Forgiveness is endorsed as a means of effectively coping with the trauma of abuse, whether physical or sexual, as well as in initiating the healing and recovery process (Sharma and Cheatham, 1986; Davenport, 1991; Perry, 1992). On a more intimate level, Fraser (1989), provided a lyrical reflection of the recovery process in an autobiographical account of incest from father to daughter. Her memoir points to the role of forgiveness in the human will to survive and in the resilience of the human spirit.

Durban (1992) also spoke to the strength of forgiveness, reporting that through hypnosis one adult female client experienced God's forgiveness as a healing element during the recall of childhood sexual abuse by an uncle.

8) forgiveness in self-treatment and treatment of addictions

Forgiveness is reported as a possible strategy in the healing of shame in alcoholics (Flanigan, 1987; Kus, 1992). It is also reported as an element of healing for couples seeking to resolve sex addiction issues (Schneider and Schneider, 1991), and was suggested as integral to a treatment model for child sex abusers seeking recovery from compulsive and harmful behaviors (Valcour, 1990).

9) forgiveness as a coping mechanism in cancer, Alzheimer's, and aging

The role of forgiveness in coping with cancer gives a unique look at the human experience of forgiveness. Cancer patients participated in a group therapy program called "forgiveness therapy" to develop an experiential understanding of the process of forgiveness (Phillips and Osborne, 1989). The study suggested that the process of forgiveness involved a struggle with guilt, blame and revenge, and a resulting growth in understanding the reciprocal nature of relationships. Mermann (1992) suggested that patients with cancer have been granted the gift of having time to prepare for the approaching end of life and among other things that may provide a peaceful entrance into death, patients may use this time to say good-bye and seek forgiveness. Concerning Alzheimer's, Kaye and Robinson (1994) suggested forgiveness may be a therapeutic event that proves helpful to caregiving wives of Alzheimer's victims. Finally, concerning aging, Peterson (1985) maintained that the process of aging may place strain on such spiritual elements of life as experiencing

forgiveness and suggested gerontological nurses try to help patients work through such issues.

10) forgiveness in individual, marriage, and family therapy

In individual psychotherapy the encouragement of forgiveness as a therapeutic intervention appears frequently in current literature. Brink (1985) suggested that forgiveness is a mechanism by which individuals may be able to maintain or restore mental health in later life. Veenstra (1992) proposed that forgiveness is appropriate for reconciliation of various forms of conflict between individuals, and Wahking (1992) proposed that spiritual growth occurs in individuals through God's grace and through interpersonal forgiveness.

Forgiveness also appears to be commonly used as a therapeutic intervention in marriage therapy. Imber-Black (1988) and Finkelstein (1991) discussed issues of healing and forgiveness in couples therapy. Neville (1989) lauded the effect of forgiveness in mediation of adversarial divorce situations. Worthington and DiBlasio (1990) described the process of mutual forgiveness within the fractured marital relationship as shown in the case of a couple married seven years. Worthington (1991) suggested marital satisfaction depends in part on confession of wrongs and forgiveness, and Stanly and Trathen (1994) proposed a marital therapy model that among other things helps couples know how to incorporate forgiveness in marriage.

In addition, forgiveness is discussed as a therapeutic intervention in family therapy. Ito (1985) presented forgiveness as a therapeutic phase of Hawaiian conflict resolution called ho'oponopono and encouraged therapists to incorporate this therapeutic phase in family therapy. Byng-Hall (1986) proposed forgiveness and reparation as important elements of healing family wounds. Hypnotherapy was used to promote spiritual healing and

forgiveness within a family by Boersma (1989), and Hebl and Enright reported that clients who were given a psychotherapeutic intervention with forgiveness as a goal were often able to forgive one person who had inflicted considerable psychological hurt.

11) forgiveness as helpful in relieving debilitating emotions

The importance of forgiveness in relieving certain emotions is reflected in current literature. Hunter (1978) suggested that clinical states ranging from grudgingness and habitual bitterness through delusions of persecution are sometimes resolved by forgiveness. Research also proposes that forgiveness is a key factor in relieving anger and depression (Benvenuto, 1984; DiBlasio and Benda, 1993; Kirkup, 1993). Lester and Leenaars (1988) and Peck (1989-90) hypothesized that suicidality may be motivated by a need for forgiveness; and Smedslund (1991) suggested that alleviation of disrespect, anger, and guilt may occur through forgiveness.

12) self-forgiveness

Current literature reveals the possibility of self-forgiveness as a therapeutic strategy in grief-resolution. Joy (1985) suggested that counsellors incorporate asking for, and granting, forgiveness in grief-resolution therapy for women experiencing depression and grief after an abortion; Cerney (1988) discussed two cases in which self-forgiveness was vital in healing the pain of remorse over the death of a loved one.

Sexton and Maddock (1984) explored the acceptance of divine forgiveness within the self for feelings of depression and guilt. Hulnick and Hulnick (1989) proposed self-forgiveness as a strategy for personal healing and empowerment in disabled clients while Hendrickson, McCarty and Goodwin (1990) spoke of self-forgiveness as an element of the

therapeutic process for 5 women with multiple personality disorder (MPD). Finally, Gerber (1990) collected verbal reports from 20 male cardiac or cancer surgeons concerning two of their patients whose surgery was not successful and who were likely to die within the next year. Many of the surgeons reported a sense of self-forgiveness as a part of their own healing process.

13) factors contributing to the inability to forgive

As seen in current literature, factors contributing to the inability to forgive reflect an aspect of humanity that appears distant from the connection or sense of communtity experienced by most individuals. Kerr (1984) wrote that Karen Horney resisted Freud's suggestion that inner dictates ("shoulds") that evolve in neurotic development are a feature of the normal personality. Kerr claimed that Horney believed such dictates are a form of self-hate that promotes self-condemnation and the inability to forgive. Brenman (1985) suggested the worship of omnipotence is felt to be superior to love and forgiveness in individuals whose behavior is characterized by cruelty and narrow-mindedness. Finally, Marks (1988) proposed that the narcissistic personality's quest for revenge and intolerance for guilt provide unconscious dynamic forces that take precedence over love and respect and may result in the absence of remorse and forgiveness.

Current human science literature on forgiveness

> Human science... studies "persons," or beings that have "consciousness" and that "act purposefully" in and on the world by creating objects of "meaning" that are "expressions" of how human beings exist in the world.
>
> (van Manen, 1990, pp 3-4)

Current human science literature on forgiveness is not characterized by the breadth of natural science literature or numbers of natural science studies available on forgiveness.

The amount of human science literature that exists on forgiveness, however, is characterized by depth.

In a phenomenological study of the development and treatment of borderline personality disorder, Fisher (1985) described the identity of borderline individuals as shame-based and proposed that the therapist's role is to provide a path out of shame by implementing a new paradigm of nurturance that includes the concepts of separation and forgiveness. In another study, Rovaletti (1991) suggested that reparation of situations in which one person has been victimized is only possible when forgiveness is given.

Rowe et al. (1989) presented a dialogal approach to phenomenological research on forgiveness that assumes dialogue is as vital in research as in teaching or in therapy. The authors used a phenomenological analysis of the experience of forgiving based on a series of interviews, discussed the importance of forgiveness in psychology and psychologists' neglect of this topic, and found forgiveness able to bring about transformative openness. The present study seeks to deepen the foundation established by Rowe et al. through looking at the human experience of touch in the context of forgiveness, a topic not specifically focused on by Rowe and his co-researchers.

Halling (1994) argued that shame is intimately connected with forgiveness. He suggested that self-forgiveness requires one to accept as part of oneself what was previously viewed as unacceptable. Halling argued that shame has been lumped into theories that assume affect is an intrapsychic mechanism set off by external stimuli. He proposed, in contrast, a phenomenological approach that systematically looks at the experience of shame as a fundamental aspect of humanity that arises in the context of genuine human relationships.

In *Existential-phenomenological Perspectives in Psychology: Exploring the Breadth of Human Experience*, editors Valle and Halling (1989) suggested that forgiveness is an issue central to human life that has been neglected by mainstream psychology and that is uniquely suited to the phenomenological approach. The present study agrees with Valle and Halling but substitutes the specific concept of touch in the context of forgiveness as a fundamental human experience that requires a phenomenological research approach.

Summary of current literature on forgiveness

McCollough and Worthington (1994) suggested there is little critical evidence for the alleged benefits of forgiveness such as improved physical and mental health, reconciliation, and restored sense of personal power. The authors encouraged researchers to back up these claims and suggested ways to promote forgiveness in clients. More critical evidence may be needed in the area of forgiveness, however, I do not believe the meaning or significance of forgiveness as a foundational human experience will ever be uncovered by natural science. Natural science is inadequate for expressing the meaning of forgiveness. A human experience of such richness and depth lends itself more fluidly and appropriately to a human science approach.

Both natural science and human science have spoken to touch and forgiveness. The human experience of touch in the context of forgiveness, however, remains unaddressed. The present study supports a phenomenological approach to human experience. The study seeks to go beyond previous research by focusing on one specific element of the forgiveness process: the element of touch.

THE QUESTION

Despite the crumbling of the family's basic relational core that is reported in contemporary literature, the value of touch seemingly has not diminished. Mothers, fathers, brothers, sisters, and friends still practice loving touch and still recognize it when they receive it. The touch moves them in a way difficult to put to words. It is this experience that led me to ask the following question: *In the context of forgiveness in love relationships, what is the meaning and significance of touch?*

By asking this question I ask for the *value* of touch in love relationships. I ask for the *good* of this touch. As stated to earlier, I want to explore the significance of touch in one specific situation of meaningful relationships: forgiveness.

CHAPTER 2

RESEARCHING THE QUESTION

> A written tradition is not a fragment of a past world, but has already raised itself beyond this into the sphere of the meaning that it expresses.
>
> (Gadamer, 1993, p. 390)

Hermeneutic phenomenology

The question seeks to uncover the experience of the forgiving touch. The question is explored in a nine-chapter format. The first chapter has set forth some of the history of touch in love relationships. The second examines the adequacy of the hermeneutic phenomenological stance for an inquiry into the experiential meaning of the forgiving touch in the context of love relationships. This sets the stage for the third chapter which includes individual narrations of the forgiving touch as it was experienced and lived by the six research participants included in the study. A text that is meant to evoke the lived meaning of touch in forgiveness is delineated in chapters four through eight. Such a text reveals the thematic dimensions of the experience, gained through in-depth and intensive interview with the six research participants. Finally, the ninth chapter discusses the potential significance of this research as well as limitations of the study. This format is most conducive to the hermeneutic phenomenological stance.

The question asks how touch in love relationships is experienced and how this touch may be significant. In looking at this experience and how it may be significant, the question searches for the *lived meaning* of touch in love relationships.

Many writers have written about touch and forgiveness. But what is the actual lived experience of touch in love relationships in the context of forgiveness? This is what I explore in this study. In asking for the lived meaning of touch in forgiveness I feel my

question is effectively pursued from the hermeneutic phenomenological stance developed by van Manen (1990). Van Manen's approach has its roots in the phenomenological philosophy of Husserl, Merleau-Ponty, Sartre, Heidegger, and Gadamer. Van Manen's approach rises from the "Dutch"[1] tradition of phenomenology, a method which combines the description-based phenomenology of Husserl and the interpretation-based phenomoenology of Heidegger. This hermeneutic phenomenological stance values the unified nature of research and writing; it claims text is an icon to evoke the meaning of the lived experience.

> The aim is to construct an animating, evocative description (text) of human actions, behaviors, intentions, and experiences as we meet them in the lifeworld.
> (van Manen, 1990, p. 19)

The traditional meaning of "essence" is that part of something without which its substance is lost. In this study, the essence of the forgiving touch is that part of the touch without which the substance of forgiving is lost. The essence is that which is necessary, that which cannot be done without, for the forgiving touch to be considered the forgiving touch.

In van Manen's approach the lived experience of a given phenomenon is dealt with through interpretation and description. The hermeneutic component is concerned with interpretation; the phenomenological component describes the phenomenon in question. This phenomenological emphasis of hermeneutic phenomenology is exemplified in its attempt to describe experience as it is lived. The hermeneutic emphasis of hermeneutic phenomenology recognizes that every description is an interpretation; to describe is to interpret (van Manen, 1990, p. 25).

An interpretation of a lived experience is just that, an interpretation. Therefore, in some respects it must necessarily fall short of a complete conveyance of the experience. Life is

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1 See page 59 for a description of various schools of phenomenology.

not so simple that we can set out to describe an experience and capture it fully, in all its dimensions. Our description, our interpretation, attempts to draw out the essence of an experience; the text, the writing, is what stands as an icon to reveal the essence of the experience. An appreciation for the meaning of phenomenology requires that I honor life as it is lived. Yet inseparable from this is the fact that I am bound to interpret life as it is lived to see how it relates to the experience at hand. I understand the interpretive descriptions I write are merely one possible interpretation. Merleau-Ponty stated this clearly in *Phenomenology of Perception*:

> Not only do we never arrive at an exclusive interpretation... but, what is more, we necessarily have to do with *equally probable* interpretations. (1962, p. 118)

Other interpretations of touch in love relationships have been written, and others are yet to come. I may never describe fully the significance of the forgiving touch. Yet the experience of the touch beckons my attempt.

> A phenomenological description is always *one* interpretation, and no single interpretation of human experience will ever exhaust the possibility of yet another complementary, or even potentially *richer* or *deeper* description.
> (van Manen, 1990, p. 31)

Hermeneutic phenomenology speaks about what lies beneath the surface, about the preverbal, about what must be uncovered to discover its meaning. Hermeneutic phenomenological research sees the familiar and the ordinary as worthy of a closer look; it values the experience of individuals and seeks to make the meaning of experience visible; it speaks of the relationship between empirical science and the lifeworld (i.e. the world as lived in, or the lived world) by researching and writing a text that reveals the essence of a particular life experience. For Merleau-Ponty, science is founded on the world as we experience it, and this is the place from which we seek to understand and find meaning:

> The whole universe of science is built upon the world as directly experienced, and if we want to subject science itself to rigorous scrutiny and arrive at a precise

> assessment of its meaning and scope, we must begin by re-awakening the basic experience of the world of which science is the second-order expression. (1962, p. viii)

In this approach, the things we experience are the data gathered in the aim of uncovering the meaning or significance of the lived experience we seek to understand. In other words, to understand touch in love relationships, I gather data which may enable me to uncover its meaning. I investigate specific experiences of touch in love relationships. I examine written descriptions of the experience, verbal descriptions of the experience, depictions of the experience in art, literature, biography, etc.. To uncover the meaning of touch in love relationships I study this touch as it is experienced in the world. I return to the thing itself, to the actual experience, in my effort to describe it. In the words of Merleau-Ponty, "To return to things themselves is to return to that world which precedes knowledge, of which knowledge always speaks, and in relation to which every scientific schematization is an abstract and derivative sign-language, as is geography in relation to the countryside in which we have learnt before hand what a forest, a prairie, or a river is." (1962, p. ix)

Hermeneutic phenomenology combines writing and research in a dynamic element--the text--seeking to interpret a phenomenon that occurs in the life world, the world as it is lived. The text should act as an icon, revealing the very nature of the experience in question. Impressionistic art is similar to the hermeneutic phenomenological text in this respect. Each seeks to evoke the essence of that which it describes.

> Rather than trying to imitate a camera and paint the surface details of a landscape, impressionist painters depict the *essence* of a landscape through the overall impression it creates. Van Gogh's "Starry Night," for example, isn't an exact copy of a clear evening sky. It's a depiction of how that night feels. It conveys the sense of a starry night, the overall impression. Because of this, it's more evocative, and thus more powerful, than an image that's photographically realistic. (Ross, 1994, pg. 30)

The same is true for hermeneutic phenomenological writing. The Handshake by Van Den Berg (1959) *depicts the essence of* the handshake *through the overall impression* the text

creates. By revealing what the handshake is not, and giving anecdotal descriptions of different forms of handshakes, Van den Berg writes a text that moves us, or resonates with us. We read The Handshake and say, "Yes. That's what it is to shake hands." Van den Berg's text *isn't an exact copy of* a handshake. *It's a depiction of how* the handshake *feels*. The text reflectively *conveys the sense of* the handshake, *the overall impression. Because of this, it's more evocative, and thus more powerful than an image that's* literally more *realistic*, such as a photograph of a handshake, or a description of the physical reality of what comprises a handshake. Thus the hermeneutic phenomenological text aims to uncover the essence of a given lived experience by evoking that essence in the way the text is written.

How to proceed

The present study investigated the experience of touch in love relationships using procedures outlined by van Manen (1990). Human science research in the form of hermeneutic phenomenological research inquires into the meaning and significance of a lived experience. The procedures of this inquiry involve six methodological research activities:

1. researching a phenomenon that interests me
2. investigating experience as we live it (gaining verbal and written descriptions)
3. reflecting on essential themes of the phenomenon
4. describing the phenomenon through text (writing and rewriting)
5. keeping a strong orientation to the phenomenon
6. considering parts and whole to balance research data with the effect of the text

These six research activities occured concurrently throughout the research process. They moved together, a unified body of methodology that sought to create an evocative text. The research activities were not a set of dictums that if followed in step by step fashion would lead to the strongest, most iconic text. Such systematic method was not the spirit of this inquiry. "The technocratic mind believes that any problem or question can be solved or answered by some technique or method" (van Manen, 1990, pg. 34). In hermeneutic phenomenological work "there is no definitive set of research procedures... that one can follow blindly" (van Manen, 1990, pg. 34). Rather, van Manen (1990) attributes the quality of this form of human science to four more elusive aspects of the research process: interpretive sensitivity, inventive thoughtfulness, scholarly tact, and the writing talent of the human science researcher.

While the procedures outlined in this study served as solid guidelines, they were flexible. I adapted specific procedures to specific elements of the question that called for such adaptation. I see hermeneutic phenomenological research as a dynamic form of human science that demands a thoughtful and scholarly approach.

Hermeneutic phenomenological research requires that the researcher keep the question open. I do not create a human science text to answer the research question in its entirety; for new possibilities are opened by the question, and new interpretations are yet to be found. The question expands itself as it is researched. It does not close to a specific "this is it" answer. It leads the researcher to deeper, more significant meanings, and to the inherent nature of questioning, an aliveness, an openness:

> Discourse that is intended to reveal something requires that that thing be broken open by the question. ...To ask a question means to bring into the open." (Gadamer, 1993, pg. 363)

In researching the question, I ask "is this the essence of the forgiving touch?" I ask "is this the essence?" I do not declare "this is the essence." Thus, the question is not closed by an exclusive interpretation. Phenomenological research, by its nature, is a subjective research endeavor. My interpretation is the interpretation of one subjective researcher. Certainly, I gain data from literature, art, interviews and the lived experience of self and others, but in the end I write the text. Human science is never purely objective. The fact that the phenomenological text is one person's interpretation points to the subjective design of this form of research. My own subjective biases can never be eliminated from the phenomenological approach; they will be delineated at the close of the following chapter.

Two types of interviews

The interviews in this study were of two forms and served two purposes. One set of interviews was designed *to gather* information through stories, anecdotes, the remembrance of specific experiences, etc.. The other set of interviews provided the interviewer and interviewee a chance *to reflect* on the lived experience in question. Both styles of interview were conversational and sought to uncover or find the meaning of the topic under question.

Thus, the conversational interview method may be used *to gather* information on or to *reflect* on the experience that is in question. Hermeneutic phenomenological research gathers experiential material, then reflects on it. The conversational interview method follows this same pattern. Interviews to gather information went on in earlier stages of the research endeavor while interviews to reflect on the experience in question took place in later stages of the research.

In this research approach the same interviewees were used in both the *gathering of* and the *reflecting on* lived-experience material (the experience of the forgiving touch).

Interviewees and others who aid in the process of hermeneutic phenomenological research are not looked upon as clients or subjects, but rather as participants. "The hermeneutic interview tends to turn the interviewees into participants or collaborators of the research project" (van Manen, 1990, p. 63).

The research

1. researching the phenomenon of touch in love relationships

To research the phenomenon of touch in love relationships requires an immersion of thought in this life experience... a *thoughtfulness*. This sort of thoughtfulness prepares the human science researcher for what lies ahead, for the actual gathering of information on touch in love relationships and reflecting on this information. In addition, the researcher carries this thoughtfulness throughout the research endeavor. Heidegger illumined this concept in his *Basic Writings*:

> To think is to confine yourself to a single thought that one day stands still like a star in the world's sky.
> (1977, p. 4)

The thoughtfulness of this research approach embeds the research in the researcher. The researcher is an important component from the beginnings of the research question to the text that results from the research process. The researcher cannot be systematically eliminated from the research, he or she is an integral part of it, a force behind the desire to understand a specific aspect of our humanness. In human science "...phenomenological research does not start or proceed in a disembodied fashion. It is always a project of someone: a real person, who, in the context of particular individual, social, and historical

life circumstances, sets out to make sense of a certain aspect of human existence" (van Manen, 1990, p. 31).

2. investigating the experience of touch as it is lived

Hermeneutic phenemonological research returns to original experience. According to van Manen (1990, p. 31), it aims to evoke the essence of an experience by returning to the experience itself. In this sense the research is founded in the work of Husserl (1911/80, p. 116) who referred to turning "to the things themselves" (Zu den Sachen) as turning to some abiding concern of lived experience; and Merleau-Ponty (1962, p. vii) who proposed that turning to the phenomena of lived experience means re-learning to look at the world by re-awakening the basic experience of the world.

This returning to original experience requires the researcher to experience what life gives, to experience the world as it is lived. It "...requires of the researcher that he or she stands in the fullness of life, in the midst of the world of living relations and shared situations" (van Manen 1990, p. 32).

With this in mind, an investigation of the lived experience of touch in love relationships in the context of forgiveness began my research inquiry. This investigation formally commenced by going to research participants and gathering personal descriptions of experiences of touch in love relationships in the context of forgiveness. Further insights into the essence of this experience were obtained through observation of such touch in love relationships, searching for descriptions of this touch in literature, poetry, and autobiography, looking for depictions of this touch in drawings, paintings, photographs and films, and examining idiomatic phrases and etymology.

a. gathering experiential descriptions of touch in love relationships in the context of forgiveness

Experiential descriptions were gathered to enrich my understanding. Because the desire and underlying goal of hermeneutic phenomenological research is to understand the nature of a phenomenon, the experiential descriptions of others become an aspect of the inquiry that allows the researcher to broaden, expand, and give fullness to his or her own experience of the topic in question. "We gather other people's experience because they allow us to be more experienced ourselves" (van Manen, 1990, p. 63). Thus, the first step in my research was to gather first-hand descriptions through interviews and written descriptions.

i. interviews with those who touch in love relationships

For this research endeavor I interviewed adults who had experienced touch in love relationships in the context of forgiveness. I believe the experience that comes from living is broadened with age, and the conscious desire of certain people to touch in love relationships provided the foundation for a rich inquiry into the lived experience of touch in love relationships. (I also gathered anecdotal descriptions from those who may or may not have had a conscious desire to touch in love relationships.) Though adults were the focus of this research project, this did not preclude the experience of children. The adult who recalls the experience of touch in love relationships may take us back to life as experienced by a child, and on occasion the interviewees did just that.

I interviewed adults of varied profession, age, sex, race, and religion hoping to gain insight into the nature of touch in love relationships through various life situations. In the initial interviews I gathered anecdotal descriptions of specific times in the life of each participant

when they experienced touch in the context of forgiveness. Here, I sought to know "What is this experience? What is its essence?"

It is often hard to remember specific times of touch. It is much easier to philosophize on what touch means or why it does or does not occur. This dichotomy forced me to be patient and tactful when conducting conversational interviews, not sacrificing the need to gain specific, concrete descriptions for the ease of friendly conversation. Rigorous and thoughtful attention was given to the particular occurrence of the phenomenon I sought to understand.

To keep conversations focused on the experience, I read anecdotal descriptions to give interviewees an idea of the concreteness and particular nature of the experience. In addition I used a line of questioning meant to slowly take the interviewee into some of their key love relationships (with a mother, father, friend, spouse, brother, sister, son, daughter, etc.). For example, questions followed a line of: a) asking participants to think of specific people whom they feel have forgiven them, or whom they feel they have forgiven, and b) asking them to think of a time when they were touched, or they initiated touch in the context of forgiveness and found in the touch a message such as, "That person forgives me", or, "I forgive that person."

I did not necessarily seek to understand the subjective experience of those I interviewed, but the phenomenological experience, or the experience of the touch as it was encountered in the world in which we live. I sought to understand the human experience of touch in love relationships. This stance of seeking to understand the nature of a lived experience remained strong; I borrowed the subjective experience of individuals to inquire into the general experience of humanity. My hope is that the subjective experience of individuals,

when combined with data gleaned from literature, art, observation, and etymology, speaks to the general experience of humanity.

ii. written descriptions

> The 'data' of human science research are human experiences. It seems natural, therefore, that if we wish to investigate the nature of a certain experience or phenomenon, the most straightforward way to go about our research is to ask selected individuals to write their experiences down.
> (van Manen, 1990, p. 63)

Written descriptions were a second source from which I gained first-hand accounts of touch in love relationships. By asking participants to write down a concrete account of a specific time when they experienced the touch in question (during forgiveness), I gathered data written in a reflective way, data that acted as a supplement to the descriptions obtained in conversational interviews. Van Manen (1990, p. 65) gives suggestions for how to gather written descriptions. The guidelines are meant to aid the participant in producing an original written description that contains certain concrete elements. I used van Manen's suggestions when obtaining written descriptions from participants. Written descriptions were obtained from participants other than those from whom conversational interviews were gathered.

b. observing touch in love relationships

By observing the forgiving touch I found more anecdotal information about the experience of touch in love relationships. There were four situations where touch in love relationships was observed: in public places; in families that I know well; in the counselling setting with couples and families; and in my own family. In each situation, the opportunity to observe hidden or 'not so readily apparent' aspects of touch in love relationships presented itself. In researching in this way, I hoped to take the attitude of an artist, who sees things that are

not at first apparent, but reveal themselves under the careful scrutiny of the artist's eye (Montgomery-Whicher, 1990).

c. searching for descriptions of touch in literature, poetry, biography

In novels, in poetry, in biography and in many other forms of literature authors have written about the experience of touch in love relationships. Such descriptions were another form of anecdotal information which aided the hermeneutic phenomenological research process.

Renee Weber writes of the impact of touch in Tolstoy's masterpiece, *The Death of Ivan Ilych* (1886):

> As Ivan Ilych struggles to die, he suddenly becomes aware of the touch of a hand upon his own, followed by a trickle of tears. This gesture, by his schoolboy son... transforms his relationship with the child.... During months of illness, Ivan Ilych has been manipulated and at best handled, but never touched, and never reached. Now, two hours before his death, he experiences the gift of touch and this serves as the trigger for a transformation. It enables him to die reconciled with his family and at peace with himself. He has learned to transcend his life-long self-centeredness and can for the first time feel love, not only for his son but even for his cold and calculating wife.
> (Weber, 1990, p. 28)

Moments such as this, written descriptions found in literature, serve to broaden the experience of the researcher and reveal elements of touch in love relationships that may otherwise be overlooked or forgotten. Tolstoy may not have been concerned with the meaning of touch in love relationships, but the fictional interpretation he provides strengthens my understanding as a researcher.

d. studying depictions of touch in paintings, sculptures, photographs, and films

Along with data gathered through interviews and written descriptions, I searched for depictions of touch in love relationships in paintings, sculptures, photographs and films. This form of data gathering furthered my understanding of the significance or meaning of touch in love relationships. Collecting groups of related images that pertain to touch in love relationships uncovered visual aspects of this touch that were not so readily apparent in the verbal and written forms of data such as interviewing and written descriptions.

An example of a painting that depicts the closeness and beauty of loving tough is *The Kiss*, by Gustaf Klimt. The painting reflects an image of intimacy tied to the position of the arms of the lovers, the way the lips are pressed to the loved one, the abandon with which the embrace is experienced.

A sculpture of the same name reflects the same depth of experience; *The Kiss*, by Auguste Rodin. Though different in design than Klimpt's painting, Rodin's sculpture captures the loving embrace in equally as potent a form. A man and a woman are locked in embrace, lost in each other, oblivious to the outside world.

Images such as *The Kiss*, whether it be Klimpt's painting or Rodin's sculpture, provided a source of visual data that revealed aspects of touch in love relationships that was not revealed by other forms of data.

e. examining idiomatic phrases and etymology

The etymological roots of key words as well as the intent of phrases and idiomatic sayings pointed to the significance of touch in love relationships. Thus, these provided another

form of data to be gathered and interpreted. For example, one of the etymological root forms of love is *belief* (Oxford, 1986). To love someone is to believe in them. Therefore, when a father touches his son in a loving way, he may be expressing his belief in his son, or his belief in the love that binds them.

In its etymological roots touch originates from Old French, *touchier*, the modern form of which is *toucher*, or *to set fire*. The intensity of this verb, to set fire, may be related to the significance of touch in love relationships. When bitterness exists between a husband and wife, a touch may feel invasive or even loathsome. When forgiveness comes to them, touch may turn from invasion to passion. In each case, the touch is intensely felt, "heated" you might say. Touch may rouse deep-seeded emotions: anger, bitterness, resentment, hatred... but also joy, passion, belief, love. At times, touch may 'set fire' to what lies inside us.

From its Latin root, *tangere*, touch carries connotations of understanding something concretely or tangibly. Touch may give us a clearer picture of the love relationship than words can give. It may give us a concrete understanding of where our 'self' lies in relation to an 'other.' Touch, in its own preverbal way, may speak most clearly of the quality of the love relationship.

3. reflecting on the experience of touch in love relationships

a. thematic analysis of experiential descriptions

Once a sufficient amount of data was gathered, in the form of experiential descriptions, I began to uncover some of the meanings latent in their contents. These meanings were

understood through the use of thematic analysis; a way of looking at specific aspects or qualities of a phenomenon that make it what it is. Themes were uncovered in order to understand the experiential significance of touch in love relationships in an orderly way. I searched for themes, hoping to define in a few words or phrases the essence or significance of the forgiving touch in love relationships. What is it that gives the experience of touch in love relationships (specifically the forgiving touch) its significance? What is it that sets touch in the context of forgiveness apart from other experiences? These are the questions I sought to address in thematic analysis. Themes served to help me make sense of the data that was gathered. "Theme gives control and order to our research and writing," (van Manen, 1990, p. 79).

"Phenomenological themes may be understood as the structures of experience," (van Manen, 1990, p. 79). Thus, when I analyzed the written descriptions gained in the research process of touch in love relationships, I analyzed the experiential structures that make up that experience. In a metaphorical sense, the hermeneutic phenomenological researcher is like a composer who listens to a fine piece of music and reflects on the climate of the composition. For this reflection to occur, the composer detects details of the composition that the untrained ear takes for granted; the tonal qualities of the work, whether large powerful instruments are used, or more delicate ones, and whether they conjure emotions of peace or joy, sorrow, happiness, pain or desperation; the complexity of the work in relation to his own expertise; are many instruments used, or few, and do they create a simple effect, a vast effect, a confusing effect, or an ominous effect; the use of dynamics, how the volume and intensity of the piece rises and falls, and whether one feels at peace or in fear, uplifted or crushed. The composer hears and articulates the musical themes or structures of experience which clearly define this composition as what it is: a classical work of majestic proportions or a fine piece of jazz. Certainly we know that this is a classical work or a jazz piece, but normally we do not reflect on the experiential

structures that make it what it is. The same is true of touch in the context of forgiveness; we can recognize it when it happens, but do not often reflect on the experiential structures that make this experience what it is. As I researched the significance of touch in love relationships, I hoped in a symbolic sense to be a phenomenological "composer", a composer who saw the experiential structures behind a specific life phenomenon, a composer who listened to what makes a certain experience what it is. This entailed reflecting on the details that are commonly taken for granted, seeking to find experiential structures in which meaning or significance may be found. The themes I uncovered are open to interpretation and are formed both by the creative and interpretive abilities of the "composer" and by the "composition" itself.

As I investigated the significance of the experience of touch in love relationships I attempted to uncover meaningful themes, structures of meaning. This was not a simple process. Many themes presented themselves. Not all of them were meaningful or essential themes of the experience. It is the task of hermeneutic phenomenological researchers to "unearth something 'telling', something 'meaningful, 'something 'thematic' in the various experiential accounts--we work at mining meaning from them" (van Manen, 1990, p. 86).

Interpretive writing may be the result of themes uncovered from experiential descriptions. Such interpretive writing may then be used as a way of focusing interviewees in the verbal interview process. It is common in hermeneutic phenomenological research to find various themes emerging throughout the endeavor. Some were eliminated, others expanded. I understand that in many cases themes I found were developed, honed, and changed in order to better interpret the significance of touch in love relationships.

b. consulting phenomenological literature

After the initial thematic analysis of lived descriptions gathered in the research endeavor, I consulted phenomenological literature to deepen my exploration of the lived experience in question. Phenomenological writings that relate to the question revealed parts of touch in love relationships that I may otherwise have overlooked. In addition, such writings were used as texts with which to dialogue concerning various aspects of the experience of touch (van Manen, 1990, pp. 75, 76). This dialogue served to expand my understanding of the experience of touch in love relationships, honing my interpretation of this touch by contributing to the development and clarification of themes.

Works such as Merleau-Ponty's *Phenomenology of Perception* (1962), both *The Psychology of the Sickbed* (1966) and *The Handshake* (1959) by Van Den Berg, and *The Tact of Teaching* (1991) by van Manen deal with reciprocal touch, the element of body and personal space, tactile communication from person to person, and contact. Each of these offered valuable insights as I sought to interpret the role of touch in love relationships. Sartre's *Being and Nothingness* (1956) also provided a strong phenomenological interpretation of the experience of touch. Throughout the research process I investigated additional phenomenological writings related to the experience of touch.

c. hermeneutic interviews

Hermeneutic interviews can be understood as interviews with the goal of interpretation in mind. Conversational interviews were given to gain interviewees' interpretations of the experience of touch in love relationships. This served to deepen my own insight into the phenomenon in question. In this sense, I hoped to fulfill the pattern of questioning presented by Gadamer in *Truth and Method*, (1993). "To understand a question means to

ask it," said Gadamer. "To understand meaning is to understand it as the answer to a question" (p. 375). I interviewed people to understand the meaning of the lived experience of the forgiving touch in love relationships. Interviewees impacted the progress and depth of my research, they added insight, they illumined that which may have otherwise remained in darkness. Interviewees changed me as I interviewed them, they drew me closer to the significance of the question. I believe, as Gadamer writes: "To reach an understanding in a dialogue is not merely a matter of putting oneself forward and successfully asserting one's own point of view, but being transformed into a communion in which we do not remain what we were" (p. 379).

4. hermeneutic phenomenological writing

When the structures of the experience of touch in love relationships began to be uncovered through interpretation and reflection on the experience as it is lived, I worked to create a new text with the aim of bringing these structures to the surface. The hermeneutic phenomenological text is the outcome of the hermeneutic phenomenological research endeavor (van Manen, 1990, p. 111).

Writing cannot be separated from the meaning revealed in a hermeneutic phenomenological description. In the text, language speaks. Therefore, the hermeneutic phenomenological researcher must be attuned to the vocal nature of the text. To return to the metaphor of the composer, just as the musical composition is a work of art, the phenomenological text is also a work of art. The difference lies in the medium of expression. The composer is attuned to the quiet effects of instruments, sounds, musical dynamics--elements of the art that must be dealt with gently, sensitively. The attentive researcher is attuned to the quiet effects of language. Language is the researcher's medium of expression; in language the

meaning or significance of the experience in question is uncovered and interpreted. Therefore: "The phenomenological method consists of the ability, or rather the art of being sensitive--sensitive to the subtle undertones of language, to the way language speaks when it allows the things themselves to speak. This means that an authentic speaker must be a true listener, able to attune to the deep tonalities of language that normally fall out of our accustomed range of hearing, able to listen to the way the things of the world speak to us" (van Manen, 1990, p. 11). In the text that is written in a hermeneutic phenomenological way, the essence or significance of a given life experience is spoken of eloquently, it is interpreted in an artistic sense.

5. keeping a strong orientation to the phenomenon

Weber (1990) stated that "therapeutic" signifies "curative" or "having healing qualities" and derives from the Greek word *therapeueia*, implying the care shown to one person by another. The *therapon* , in the Greek sense of the word was an attendant, a living person, a healing presence. Psychology is the science of the human soul or mind, taking its root from the Greek word *psyche* meaning breath, soul, and life. From Greek mythology, Psyche was a maiden who personified the soul. She was loved by Eros, the god of love. Psyche in the modern sense is defined as "the soul; the mind, both conscious and unconscious" (Webster, 1990, pg. 806). I am a psychologist[2] , or counsellor, who works

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[2] A distinction between "psychologist" and "counsellor" may prove helpful.

As of 1995 the state of Washington has defined four legal terms related to the practice of psychology: *registered counsellor*, *mental health counsellor*, *marriage and family therapist*, and *psychologist*. To be a *registered counsellor*, one must have a Bachelor's degree and be registered with the state. To be licensed as a *mental health counsellor*, one must have an appropriate Master's degree, one must pass a written exam, and one must offer proof of 2000 hours of supervised practice. To be licensed as a *marriage and family therapist*, one must have an appropriate Master's degree, one must pass a written exam, and one must offer proof of 2000 hours of supervised practice. To be licensed as a *psychologist*, one must have an appropriate doctoral degree, one must pass a written exam (The Exam for the Professional Practice of Psychology (EPPP)), one must pass an oral exam, and one must offer proof of 3000 hours of supervised practice.

As of 1995, the province of Alberta, Canada, has defined one legal term for the practice of psychology: *psychologist*. To be licensed as a *psychologist*, one must have an appropriate Master's degree, one must

with people to promote their healing. I am concerned with the care shown by one person to another, and I am concerned with the state of the human soul or mind. In the Greek sense, a psychologist or counsellor is a *therapon*, a healing presence. In light of this, I hoped to keep a strong orientation to the curative and healing elements of working with the human soul and mind when conducting the present hermeneutic phenomenological research.

The hermeneutic phenomenological text needs to be oriented and strong. Van Manen (1990) proposed pedagogy as a strong and exclusive orientation to human science research. He stated:

> Whatever approach we seek to develop, it always needs to be understood as an answer to the question of how an educator stands in life, how an educator needs to think about children, how an educator observes, listens, and relates to children, how an educator practices a form of speaking and writing that is pedagogically contagious (p. 151).
>
> A strong pedagogic orientation requires that one reads any situation in which an adult finds himself or herself with a child as a pedagogic situation, as an answer to the question of how we should be and act with children (p. 152).

My orientation differed from that of van Manen's. Rather than working from the orientation of pedagogy, I worked from the orientation of therapeutic psychology. Substituting the words "therapeutic psychology" for "pedagogy" and "psychologist" for "educator", and making some minor adjustments to the words of van Manen allows a clear view of how I worked to keep a strong orientation in implementing the present hermeneutic phenomenological research:

> Whatever approach we seek to develop, it always needs to be understood as an answer to the question of how a psychologist stands in life, how a psychologist needs to think about people, how a psychologist observes, listens, and relates to people, how a psychologist practices a form of speaking and writing that is psychologically and therapeutically contagious.

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pass a written exam (the EPPP, the same exam for *psychologists* in Washington), one must pass an oral exam, and one must offer proof of 1,500 hours of supervised practice.

I am a licensed *psychologist* in the province of Alberta, and I am a licensed *mental health counsellor* in the state of Washington. Because of this *psychologist* and *counsellor* are used interchangeably in this study.

> A strong therapeutic psychological orientation requires that one reads any situation in which a person finds himself or herself with another person as a psychologically therapeutic situation, as an answer to the question of how we should be and act with people.

Just as the pedagogical orientation does not chain an educator to the classroom, so the psychologically therapeutic orientation does not chain a psychologist to the counselling session. The educator finds data to strengthen his or her orientation in many areas of the lifeworld, in varied situations of lived experience. The same is true for the psychologist.

Thus, the form of hermeneutic phenomenological study which I conducted introduced psychology as its orientation and in so doing, became a medium through which psychological theory was proposed and developed. In researching the lived experience of touch in love relationships, I proposed that the self is known and developed in the experience of touch in significant relationships. When another person touches us, we not only feel their touch, we feel ourselves. When you touch me, I not only know you, I know myself, or my 'self'.

6. consider parts and whole

To balance the research context by considering parts and whole, the effects and ethics of human science research were considered. Human science of this sort may have a transformative effect on both the researcher and the participants in the research. Feelings of shame, doubt, and anxiety may arise in the interview process--but also feelings of insight, increased self value, and confidence. Hermeneutic phenomenological research methods may challenge and change the health practices of both individuals and institutions.

Also in considering parts and whole, the plan and context of research procedures was kept in mind. In order to gain experiential descriptions of the touch of forgiveness, participants

with a high level of reflective thinking were chosen over those with a more concrete level of thinking. Four of the six people I interviewed were at or beyond the graduate level academically and each of them provided a good base from which to gather experiential descriptions. Two of the participants in this study were not at the graduate level academically. They were, however, reflective thinkers who provided rich descriptions of the lived experience of the forgiving touch.[3] Literature, written anecdotes of touch in love relationships, and various art forms also played an important part in the research process.

I further balanced the research endeavor by confronting it existentially. The way I proceeded in producing a hermeneutic phenomenological text was to weave four "existentials" into my description of the phenomenon in question: temporality (lived time), spatiality (lived space), corporeality (lived body), and sociality (lived relationship to others). This involved interpreting time, space, body, and relation to others differently in the context of the forgiving touch in love relationships than in the forgiving touch outside of love relationships. The *significance* of the forgiving touch in love relationships was the aim of my inquiry.

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[3] I sought out reflective "verbal" participants based on hermeneutic phenomenological dissertations previously completed in the Department of Educational Psychology at the University of Alberta. In retrospect, such reflective engaging in the phenomenon by participants may have backfired, for participants found it very difficult to simply report their experiences without also including their own interpretations of their experience. It is apparent that the reflective nature of the participants can be both a strength and a weakness of this investigation.

Participants who speak more of the concrete experience than of their understanding of the experience may provide the hermeneutic phenomenological researcher with a more clear view of the phenomenon in question. Osborne (1990) summarizes this dilemma:

> "Participants should be people who have experienced and can illuminate the phenomenon. Such a prerequisite does not necessarily mean a "verbal" person. Extremely verbal people may express ideas about their experiences rather than the actuality of those experiences." (p. 82)

DANGERS OF RESEARCHER BIAS

"I may well close my eyes, and stop up my ears, I shall nevertheless not cease to see, if it is only the blackness before my eyes, or to hear, if only silence, and in the same way I can 'bracket' my opinions or the beliefs I have acquired, but, whatever I think or decide, it is always against the background of what I have previously believed or done."

(Merleau-Ponty, 1962, p. 395)

The current study was conducted using the hermeneutic phenomenological method outlined by van Manen (1990). A brief description of how this method is positioned in contemporary phenomenological psychology may provide a foundation for a discussion of the dangers of researcher bias. Such a description necessarily involves an elucidation of both foundational phenomenology and hermeneutics-based phenomenology.

Osborne (1993) demonstrated both the need for clarification of phenomenological method when conducting a phenomenological study, and the need to resolve "the metatheoretical conflicts that result from eclectic research practice which at times combines procedures that come from conflicting phenomenologies such as those of Husserl and Heidegger" (p. 174). What follows is a discussion of the "metatheoretical conflicts" of a research practice that even in its title (hermeneutic phenomenology) confronts the difficulties posed by differing views represented in Husserl and Heidegger.

There are two main branches of twentieth century phenomenology as suggested by Osborne (1990), and Ray (1994). The "primary" branch is the pure and transcendental phenomenology of Husserl, and the second branch is the hermeneutic phenomenology of Heidegger. Osborne and Ray recognize that Gadamer, Merleau-Ponty, Sartre, and others could be included in the second branch, but for clarity they discuss only the metatheoretical contrast between Husserl and Heidegger.

Husserl's phenomenological philosophy has been summarized as a philosophy which sought to describe the essential structures inherent to consciousness, the prereflective, or transcendental structures (Osborne, 1990; Ray, 1994; Cohen and Omery, 1994). Also referred to as "essences", these universal structures were said to "pervade human experience" (Osborne, 1993, p. 169). Husserl believed the structures could not be uncovered by induction, but rather must be known intuitively, or as the result of what Husserl called "eidetic seeing". Phenomenology, as presented by Husserl, was intended to be an eidetic science (a science by which universal structures or essences are known through a form of direct intuition) that would form the base for other sciences. Contemporary phenomenological research, however, "has not always followed Husserl's original intention" (Osborne, 1993, p. 170). Contemporary phenomenological research has often focused on more domain specific structures of meaning, rather than the universal structures envisioned by Husserl, and such domain specific structures have commonly been identified through the uncovering of thematic meanings within a given human experience. The distinction between the identification of universal versus domain specific structures remains unclear in contemporary phenomenological research, and lends to the confusion regarding metatheoretical bases in phenomenological method.

Osborne stated the purpose of phenomenological research "is to illuminate the phenomenon of interest through careful description by way of the intuitive process..." (p. 170). He summarized the metatheoretical division between the traditional phenomenology of Husserl and the hermeneutics-based phenomenology of Heidegger as follows:

> Husserlian phenomenology by means of bracketing and reduction asserts that we can actually see "things as they are" through intuitive seeing, whereas hermeneutic phenomenology asserts that the presence of interpretation is unavoidable. This issue is a major point of division between two primary branches of phenomenology...." (p. 170).

A description of Husserlian "bracketing" and "reduction" may clarify the metatheoretical division represented in Husserl and Heidegger. In Husserlian philosophy

reduction encompasses bracketing; reduction is presented as the continual endeavor to set aside (or bracket) presuppositions concerning the nature of the phenomenon of interest in order to be able to see the universal structure or essence of the phenomenon. Rollo May's (1961) description of this process lends understanding: "...because every psychology, every way of understanding man, is based upon certain presuppositions, the psychologist must continually analyze and clarify his own presuppositions. One's presuppositions always limit and constrict what one sees..." (p. 80). In addition, Ray (1994, p. 119) describes bracketing as "holding in abeyance one's preconceptions about the world and seeking to attain the genuine and true form of the things themselves." Husserl's phenomenological philosophy utilizes a continual recognition of the researcher's natural way of experiencing the world; a gradually increasing awareness of presuppositions and the will to bracket them or set them aside.

Husserlian phenomenology is characterized by the gradual development of a transcendental attitude (or presuppositionless knowing) with the hope of apprehending or identifying universal structures or essences of meaning within a given phenomenon. Heidegger's hermeneutic method was an attempt to "interpret the meanings which lie beyond descriptive phenomenology because he believed that pure description is limited in its ability to reveal meaning" (Osborne, p. 173). Heidegger's hermeneutic method takes a more rigid stance regarding presuppositions, even to the point that the ideal of presuppositionless knowing is discarded. The metatheoretical division between the two branches of twentieth century phenomenology has been portrayed thusly:

> Heidegger did not believe in Husserl's attempt to achieve presuppositionless knowing through the processes of bracketing and reduction until pure description revealed the meaning of the "things themselves". He thought Husserl's reduction to be misleading and dispensable (Spiegelberg, 1982).
>
> (Osborne, 1993, p.173).

Osborne claims that contemporary authors such as Colaizzi (1978), Giorgi (1975) "routinely prescribe the procedures of bracketing and reduction without discussing the

fundamental disagreement between Husserl and Heidegger on the integrity of such operations." These authors appear to hold the procedures of bracketing and reduction to be worthwhile despite what some researchers consider a "utopian" hope of presuppositionless knowing; this may be because Colaizzi and Giorgi identify with what Cohen and Omery (1994) refer to as the "Duquesne school" which is guided by Husserlian phenomenology. Cohen and Omery further clarify the Husserlian or "Duquesne school" view of reduction:

> *Reduction* is the process of putting aside the natural world (one could even say the world of interpretation) in order to see the phenomenon as it is in its essence. Reduction is the process of looking at the experience naively without the preconditions, the prejudice, and the biases that one usually brings to any description. (1994, p. 148)

Yet as both Osborne (1990) and Ray (1994) illustrate, many contemporary human science researchers do not identify with Husserlian phenomenology. Osborne and Ray point to the division between Husserlian phenomenology and Heidegger's hermeneutics-based phenomenology. Cohen and Omery not only point to these two "schools" of thought, but to a third, the "Dutch school", which they refer to as a combination of the Husserlian description-based tradition and the Heideggarian interpretation-based tradition.

Cohen and Omery include Giorgi, Colaizzi, Fischer, and van Kaam in the "Duquesne school" of phenomenology; they cite Dickelmann, Allen and Tanner as guided by Heideggarian tradition; and they list Langeveld, Buitedijk, and Linschoten as scholars of the "Dutch school" of phenomenology. Cohen and Omery also stated that "Barrit et al. (1983, 1984) and van Manen (1990) wrote particularly clear and helpful texts describing Dutch phenomenology and its use in research" (1994, p. 150). Because the current investigation is based on van Manen's methodology (a member of the "Dutch school" of phenomenology), a combination of both the description of Husserlian tradition and the interpretation of Heideggarian tradition was used.

Whatever the "school" of phenomenology the researcher is associated with, it appears fundamental that bracketing be employed in the investigation. May's (1969) insights further clarify this need:

> No one, physicist, psychologist, or anyone else, can leap out of his historically conditioned skin. But the one way we can keep the presuppositions underlying our particular method from undue biasing effect is to know consciously what they are and so not to absolutize or dogmatize them (p. 80).

Whatever methodology a researcher uses to illuminate a phenomenon, responsibility lies with the researcher to not only bracket presuppositions, but to recognize the metatheoretical division represented in Husserl and Heidegger.

Perhaps the most common contemporary approach concerning the division between Husserl and Heidegger is an unknowing combination of the two views in which presuppositions are bracketed even while the procedure of bracketing is acknowledged as "utopian". In the current study, this combination is openly acknowledged: in the following pages I have attempted to bracket presuppositions while recognizing that pure bracketing or presuppositionless knowing is an unreachable ideal.

Because van Manen's methodology was used in this investigation, it is appropriate to refer to his definition of bracketing before such bracketing is employed.

> Bracketing describes the act of suspending one's various beliefs in the reality of the natural world in order to study the essential structures of the world. The term "bracketing" was borrowed from mathematics by Husserl (1911/80), the father of phenomenology, who himself was a mathematician (1990, pp. 175-176).

In response to the division between the metatheories represented by Husserl and Heidegger and the bracketing referred to in van Manen's method, I acknowledge I possess biases that require bracketing, and I acknowledge that a pure bracketing or "presuppositionless knowing" is unattainable. Thus, in the current study, bracketing serves to strengthen the

research process by conscious recognition of presuppositions, enfolded in the understanding that presuppositions can never be completely "set aside".

A number of presuppositions presented themselves in the process of this research. One is my spirituality. I have spiritual beliefs which help shape the action I take in the world. This particular form of spirituality, which I call "traditionally Christian", influenced my decision to sample a "traditionally Christian" population, and thus may have kept from my understanding of forgiveness and touch the meaning that may have risen from interviewing individuals with differing beliefs. Though I admit certain presuppositions, admitting limits does not negate them; for example, my faith in God may not only limit the current study, in some cases it may conceal things visible to another researcher. In teaching, in counselling, and in my personal life I live and breathe with those who do not share my faith, and I am deepened by them. But even in such deepening, my own faith remains and requires bracketing in order to keep from dogmatizing those who hold a differing or even opposing view, and to illumine ranges of knowledge that may otherwise have been blocked by my presuppositions. Similarly, even within the narrow sample of this study the presuppositions associated with my view of "traditional Christianity" were set aside, for to enter the lived world of the participants I had to be open to their individualized relationship to God, and each participant's "beliefs about the reality of the natural world." Again, a purely objective entering of another individual's lived world may be impossible, but the researcher's bracketing of personal presuppositions is the most ethical and logical extension of this ideal.

The meanings I uncovered in this study were molded and shaped in part by my own biases. This is a limitation I admit to and see as an inherent component of the phenomenological process, just as Heidegger suggested that presuppositionless knowing is "misleading" and "dispensable", I do not claim to have reached "presuppositionless knowing". Rather than

revealing universal structures or essences, this study may be more accurately described as having revealed one interpretation of domain specific structures or essences. Each of the six participants in this study presented their experience, and narratives describing their experience, from his or her uniquely individualized world view. In the attempt to enter these individualized perspectives, world views, and Christian orientations, I endeavored to bracket my own perspective, world view, and Christian orientation. Many of the presuppositions I endeavored to bracket are referred to below.

A gender-specific view of human interaction necessitated bracketing; as a male, thinking or acting as a female is something I can only experience through the verbal and experiential account of females. A "male" orientation toward competition and power versus a "female" orientation toward relational strength and care was set aside in the attempt to meet research participants in their world and on their ground. My own view of human interaction, which I characterize as a combination of the "male" and "female" perspectives (relationality aside competition) required bracketing to attempt to see clearly the perspective of participants and reduce the burden of my own subjective perspective on the data.

I was raised in a lower middle class anglo family in North America. I have lived on the Northern Cheyenne Native American reserve in southeast Montana and I have spent considerable time with the homeless in southern California. I saw my parents divorce, and eventually remarry. These and other factors are a part of my history; they helped shape many of my beliefs about the world. Such factors, arising from my personal, familial, and cultural experience of the world necessitated bracketing.

From influences in my own lived world I have chosen a world-view of soft determinism. Defined simply, this means I believe humanity is largely determined by environmental, biological, or natural factors in life, but there always remains, no matter how finite, the

power to consciously decide one's attitude or thought toward the conditions of life. Each person in this study had an individualized approach to humanity and the world; I attempted to bracket my own approach in order to more fully engage in the lived world of the participants. In the end my biases, though balanced by personal and professional experience and "set aside" through bracketing, create a subjectivity that I believe can never be fully escaped. I can never be totally separated from my personal orientation to the world.

The phenomenological researcher using van Manen's method gathers data on a given experience, interprets the data to "illumine" the meaning of the experience, and writes a text that seeks to evoke this meaning. The gathering, the interpreting, and the writing are never purely objective; each facet is colored by many variables included in the subjectivity of the researcher. As a gatherer, interpreter, and writer, my own subjective experience weighs heavily on the final outcome of this project.

The following chapters address the question: In the context of forgiveness in love relationships, what is the experiential meaning of touch for those who hold a "traditionally Christian" view? In considering bias, the reader must determine how vast an influence my personal subjectivity imposed on the data. Finally, it is also left to the reader to determine whether this research identified merely domain specific essences of meaning, or whether it points to more universal structures. Van Manen referred to this reader-based credibility as what Buytendijk termed the "phenomenological nod". The phenomenological nod occurs when a text points to something we can "nod to" or identify as "an experience we had or could have had", an experience that "resonates with our sense of lived life" (1990, p. 27).

CHAPTER 3

STORIES OF THE FORGIVING TOUCH

> ...it must be emphasized that language has its true being only in dialogue, in coming to an understanding.
>
> (Gadamer, 1993, p. 446)

> Conversation is a process of coming to an understanding. Thus it belongs to every true conversation that each person opens himself to the other, truly accepts his point of view as valid and transposes himself into the other to such an extent that he understands not the particular individual but what he says.
>
> (Gadamer, 1993, p. 385)

Language often defines our understanding of the world. It is by the spoken word we communicate our experience of life, and the personal meaning of our experience. The verbal nature of humanity gives voice to that which lies inside us, it speaks of our own individual understanding of our own individual experience. Language, therefore, was the primary research mode for the present study.

The personal experience of individuals provides the foundation for this study. Out of the experience of six people who participated in this research endeavor an interpretation rises of the experience of touch in love relationships in the specific context of forgiveness. The narratives included here formed a tapestry in which the threads of certain thematic dimensions were found. Such thematic threads were then gathered to create one interpretation of the experience in question, an interpretation that proceeds in subsequent chapters. Other interpretations of the essence or meaning of the forgiving touch could be gathered from the same set of conversations, the same group of narratives. My interpretation is not exclusive.

Despite the non-exclusive nature of this research, the depth of human experience speaks to the appropriateness of the hermeneutic phenomenological approach. An interpretation of the meaning of human experience necessarily goes deeper than the current stage and

process models of forgiveness, for such an interpretation emerges from individual human experience and by design resonates with the experience of humanity. This is not to say that certain stages or processes are not present in forgiveness, it is merely an interpretation that looks beneath empiricism to focus on the world as it is lived. Empirical science does not provide a suitable framework from which to unveil the richness of human experience. The richness of human experience, for it to be understood, requires the language of experience and the meaning of experience that accompanies this language. It is in the framework of narrative, founded on in-depth conversation, that language is best suited to evoke the meaning of human experience (Gadamer, 1993; van Manen, 1990).

The present study seeks to deepen current human science endeavors by speaking to one specific element of the lived experience of forgiveness: touch. The present study is more narrow in scope and more specific in content than previous human science studies of forgiveness.

The stories of the forgiving touch originally spoken by participants are recorded here to mirror the heart of each person's experience, and to echo the meaningful understandings with which each participant enfolded their experience. Each story of touch and forgiveness emerges from the lifestory, the lived experience and world view, of a particular individual. Each conversational interview contained central and not so central tensions, movements, and ideas. The stories occur for each individual at a specific point in the history of their world, a moment of life that is uniquely personal yet at the same time woven into the history and experience of humanity. Each story is shaped by the central plot of forgiveness, and the central experience of touch. Each story is moved by the history and context of a specific love relationship, and as such must be interpreted within this history and this context. It is from a moment in the lived world of individuals, a moment when

forgiveness and touch coincide, that the general experience of touch and forgiveness in humanity is reflected.

Four males and two females, ranging in age from 22 to 53, were included in this study. Five participants were Caucasian, and one Native American. Participants came from diverse occupational and socio-economic backgrounds: two female mental health therapists, a male student, a male blue-collar worker, a male mental health therapist, and a male private business owner.

The process by which I selected the participants, and my relationship to each participant, is important to record in order to give a deeper understanding of how the research is contextualized. During a year long pilot study (conducted as a part of van Manen's course on hermeneutic phenomenology) I selected the topic of touch and forgiveness and began to explore several methods of investigation. Two separate courses of undergraduate students were asked to provide written descriptions of their experience of the forgiving touch. After 14 months of background search concerning the phenomenon I sought participants for the current study. Some of these I had previously spoken to concerning touch and forgiveness, others developed from a process of initial questioning designed to find participants who both remembered an experience of the forgiving touch vividly and who felt that they were able to articulate this experience.

I had known Joshua for approximately 12 years when I approached him to be a participant in this study. I had heard him speak on the topic of forgiveness more than once, and I had seen him implement forgiveness within the context of his family. I felt confident he could articulate his experience of the forgiving touch. I had known Joshua on both a professional and personal basis.

When I approached John to participate in the study we had been colleagues for approximately 7 years, working together with youth for a number of summers and working along side each other in a counselling agency for one year. John had given guest lectures in some of the undergraduate seminars I had taught.

Sarah was an acquaintance I had known for approximately two years when I approached her concerning this study. I had counselled families, couples, and children under her supervision for a year in partial fulfillment of the requirements for a doctoral degree in counselling psychology.

Joseph was a childhood acquaintance who later became a professional colleague. We both lived on the Northern Cheyenne Indian Reservation in southeast Montana for a few years when we were growing up. He is a number of years younger than I and this limited our youthful friendship; we met again as adults and became colleagues. In personal conversation he had related to me the story of forgiveness between him and his mother.

Sarah was also a professional and personal acquaintance, I had known her for about 10 years when I approached her about being a participant in this study. I had heard her speak to groups of youth about family relationships and I hoped she would be a willing participant.

Peter, the final interviewee, was a personal acquaintance I had known for one year when I approached him concerning participation in this study. I admired his honesty and felt confident that he would be able to articulate his experience of the forgiving touch.

Further information concerning each participants' history is provided in following pages (prior to each participant's narration of the forgiving touch). To provide a framework from

which to view the context of the interpretation represented in this study a more thorough history of the participants is here provided.

Participants, on the whole, represented a high level of education and interpersonal sophistication. Each participant offered in-depth, articulate renditions of their personal experiences. Each participant was familiar with self-disclosure and both able to and interested in reporting personal feelings (four of the participants had experienced formal counselling or were counsellors themselves, and the other two were willing to self-disclose throughout the interview process). Four of the participants (Joshua, John, Joseph, and Miriam) had often spoken informally about forgiveness in their lives, while two of the participants (Sarah and Peter) had never spoken in depth about forgiveness before the interview process. In addition, each person spoke from a world view of Christian spirituality. An understanding of forgiveness as a relational concept embedded in a specific faith in God was an important part of each participant's history.

To appreciate the context in which each participant had a previous understanding of forgiveness it is necessary to briefly describe their religious affiliation. Joshua's faith in God may be referred to as a contemporary Catholic belief in which he maintained much of the symbolism of Catholicism with an element of evangelical faith at the forefront of his action in the world. John's belief in God can be characterized as contemporary Baptist, a personal faith that John stated directs much of his stance toward himself and humanity. Sarah's faith is Unitarian, a tradition of belief that is less rigid than many traditional denominations (e.g., Lutheran, Catholic, Baptist) and, according to Sarah, a belief that guides many of her choices in life. Joseph's faith rose from the Christian Missionary Alliance denomination. He states his belief is non-denominational and his faith is based on the truths found in the Bible. He also claims certain elements of Native American spirituality (that he states are united with Christianity) as a part of his faith. Miriam was

raised Episcopalian and has converted to a more non-denominational faith in recent years. Like Joseph, she states that her faith is based on the truths of Christianity as found in the Bible and says her faith is the foundation of her moral philosophy. Peter claims a faith in God based on the Pentecostal denomination. Peter believes that the difference between Pentecostal and other Christian denominations is the Pentecostal's emphasis on the importance of the Holy Spirit. Peter also explained that while all traditionally Christian denominations include the Holy Spirit as foundational, the Pentecostal denomination places greater emphasis on the "gifts" of the Holy Spirit as represented in the book of Acts in the New Testament.

Some commonalties of faith presented themselves in the interview process. The participants unanimously declared a Christian faith, they claimed to live life from a moral philosophy based in their view of Christianity, and they testified to a "personal" faith in God (a faith characterized by contact with God through prayer, Bible reading, and love toward the world). Despite these commonalties, the context of each participant's faith cannot be grouped as one. It becomes obvious in the experience and the narrations of these participants that each faith is individualized and meaningful in different ways. Certainly, the participants verbalized that they are Christian, but every person's experience arose from their unique history. Herman Feifel, in his article within the collection edited by Rollo May entitled *Existential Psychology*, spoke succinctly about what I am here trying to convey.

> One should be cautious in considering the religious person as invariant; the same holds true for the nonreligious person. Individuals may derive values (sociability, emotional support, sense of belongingness, etc.) and need-satisfactions from religious membership and participation that are not necessarily related to religious belief and commitment. Also, individuals may frequently express a religious identification (tradition) without formal membership or commitment. And often, there may be a difference between the value-commitments of the individual and those required by the "official" theological structure of his particular faith. (1961, p. 68)

Each participant's experience is based in the context of a unique life. Stated simply, the Christianity of participants does not separate them from their existence in humanity;

participants are first embedded in humanity, then in all the values, choices, relationships and actions that constitute the individual's life.

Each participant related that within their individualized Christian tradition forgiveness was understood as necessary between God and the individual, and between the individual and humanity. Participants revealed that due to a moral philosophy based on their own understanding of Christianity, forgiveness was vital to their relation to God and to loved ones. Early in the interview process it became apparent that each participant understood touch and forgiveness on a cerebral level, but as the interview process continued understanding seemed to move from the cerebral to what may be characterized as a "heart" or "soul" understanding.

Participants consistently expressed not only the context of their experience but their own personal interpretation of it as well. Upon reflection, participant's personal interpretation pointed to what I believe is central to forgiving touch: that the experience is interwoven with individualized meaning[1]. In the forgiving touch, participants "knew" that forgiveness was communicated.

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1 Van Manen's hermeneutic phenomenology endeavor's to be both descriptive and interpretive, with the researcher taking experiential accounts and interpreting these accounts in order to identify the "essence" of the experience in question. In the course of this study, participants found it difficult, if not impossible, to relate their experience of the forgiving touch without including their own interpretation of the meaning the touch had for them. Thus this research not only became an interpreting of the experience, but also an interpreting of the interpretations each person gave of their experience. The danger of such a process is that the reflections of interview subjects may be framed by the researcher as authoritative; the researcher attempted to address this danger by maintaining a strong orientation to the phenomenon under investigation.

Though van Manen's hermeneutic phenomenology is proposed as descriptive and interpretive, the reflections (or individualized interpretations) of the participants added an additional layer of interpretation to the process. With this in mind, the descriptive focus of the study was shifted from being primarily focused on interpreting lived-experience to having a dual focus on interpreting lived-experience and participants' interpretations of their lived-experience.

Forgiveness was central to participants' experience and underlying forgiveness one specific meaning seemed to capture the essence of forgiving touch: emotional freedom. The burdens of unforgiveness were taken away; internal peace returned. In the context of each story it appeared that participants found or made meaning in the forgiving touch, and this meaning was characterized in every instance by a rush of freedom, by the lifting of a burden, by an experience of restoration.

The initial goal of the present study was to gather experiential data and to interpret it. Yet in doing so a process unfolded that shed light on the experience of touch and forgiveness. Participants did not merely speak of the context of their experience, they included the individualized meaning of their experience. The possibility presents itself that forgiving touch may be so interwoven with individualized meaning that experience and interpretation cannot be completely separated. Yet it must also be recognized that to declare such a possibility is also somewhat dangerous; for what a novice researcher regards as the inseparable nature of experience and interpretation in the context of touch and forgiveness, the experienced researcher may regard as merely the novice's inability to clearly articulate, describe, and interpret the phenomenon in question. With this understood, I endeavored to interpret the experience of the forgiving touch in a way that would not silence the voice of the participants, but rather that would let them speak the meaning of this phenomenon both through their experiences and through their interpretations.

The stories

The original stories ranged from 40 to 70 typewritten pages in length. They included interviewer questions, observations, and comments as well as interviewee answers and detailed descriptions (see Appendix D). These documents were painstakingly reduced to the stories that follow. In every case, including all passages that were shortened, the actual wording of the participant was of paramount importance. Each story was extracted from

the transcripts of the original interviews, each story was edited and paraphrased for clarity and word economy, and each story remains as close to verbatim as possible. The stories are free of the interviewer's personal interpretation and the questions and comments of the interviewer have been eliminated entirely. Each story was meticulously preserved to represent the voice of each participant.

Participants experienced the forgiving touch, and participants interpreted the forgiving touch. Thus, the following stories are recorded first as they were experienced, and second as they were interpreted.

Joshua's background and how I experienced him

Joshua is a tall man with dark hair that has silvered at his temples. He carries himself with such confidence and intensity that he can be intimidating. He was raised in poverty in a family of eight. He enjoyed playing competitive basketball in high school and at university. Upon completion of an MA in business administration Joshua coached university basketball for a number of years before he started his own marriage and family counselling practice in one of the larger cities in the northwestern United States. After counselling marriages, families, and individual adults for over five years, Joshua founded a summer sports camp. The first summer of Joshua's camp saw about 100 attendees. Now, more than 20 years later, he is president of one of the largest sports camps in North America and a highly successful corporation. Joshua employs nearly 600 workers and invests his time teaching life skills to the over 7,000 young people who attend his camps each summer.

On a more personal basis, in interview it was apparent Joshua's faith in God drives his action as a husband and as a father. He seeks to maintain intimacy and depth in relation to his wife and children. He places great value on family. I experienced Joshua as a verbal

person who expresses his opinions with authority, yet speaks openly and respectfully. In meaningful relationships he relates he is not passive; he is vocal and active in his pursuit of mutual respect and in expressing his love.

Joshua was 53 when he experienced a moment of touch and forgiveness with his 14 year old son. Joshua's son had been distant from him emotionally. Joshua felt his son was approaching him with bitterness; he felt that his son was closed to positive communication. After some intense interaction and a short time apart from each other, Joshua's son came to a point when he wanted Joshua's forgiveness. He sought out his father and initiated forgiveness. Joshua forgave his son and a particularly emotional time of touch was experienced. Our conversations took place in Joshua's home. He appeared to enjoy sharing the memories uncovered in the interview process, and based on the content of these memories he was obviously invested in the value of both touch and forgiveness in his significant relationships.

Joshua's story as he experienced it[2]

It happened last year after our camp with my 14 year old son. He's quiet, he's not very verbal, he's kind, and not aggressive. Those kind of attributes don't do very well on a basketball court so as his coach we've been working on him becoming more aggressive. And he's becoming more aggressive and sometimes when you do that, you go over the line. That week in camp he went over the line a couple of times. There was some discipline involved and I wanted to be careful not to discipline him too much but I remember specifically that he had an altercation with this one kid and I said tomorrow when we play, that kid is probably going to come after you again, and I want you to play real aggressive but I do not want you to respond to his verbal taunting and get into a shouting

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[2] Josua's story, as well as the five subsequent stories are told in first person by each participant. The voice and questions of the interviewer have been deleted in order to provide the reader with an unobstructed reading of each individual's experience, and each individual's interpretation of their experience.

match and so forth. That was my expectation as his coach and it didn't happen, so I disciplined him. I sat him on the bench ... to have him think about it for a while. I spoke to him saying that the one expectation I had was that you not respond or retaliate... and I was real disappointed when you chose that.

It had been a great week and every boy on the team except my son was real verbal in their appreciation and communication to me about their week. There were hugs... and we just had a great week as a team at this camp. But my son didn't want to communicate and he didn't want to talk about the week. He was very verbal with his teammates and nobody else. So as I tried to communicate with him on the way home, he didn't want to communicate. I wanted to talk about the process of the week and some of the things he did real well, and some of the things we wanted to work on. I wanted especially to deal with this player/coach relationship. But there in the car I wasn't getting anywhere. And there was a defiance in him. And it also carried over into his relationship with his mother; he wasn't communicating with his mom. So she was feeling some of this frustration.

From my standpoint there were hurt feelings. I wanted to coach for my son. Yet with his attitude I simply would not be able to do so. It was like this, you shook the other team members' hands or you put your arm around their shoulder in a fatherly way, and with them there was an obvious sense of appreciation. But there wasn't with my son.

In the anger and bitterness the other person is not attractive to you and you just want to keep distance. This may have been how my son felt toward me before the forgiveness, and it was how I felt concerning his attitude toward his mother and I.

When we got to the house I said, "Our unity is more important than the other factors. I feel that the coach/player relationship has undermined our unity, so I'm not going to coach your

team anymore until we get this resolved. And if we can't get this resolved, then I will not coach. So you need to think about what we've said and when you're ready to talk, we'll talk, but as of now, I'm no longer your coach."

I wanted my son to think about it and reflect on it. I didn't know if it would take a day, or a week, or if it would just end there. But about an hour later he came in and asked me if we could talk. We sat down and he shared his feelings. One, that he really wanted me to stay as a coach. Two, that he realized he needed to talk more. He looked at me and asked me to forgive him for his attitude.

I was sitting down and he just sort of crumpled into my arms and just... for a 14 year old boy to cry that hard... to sob that much ... to tell me how much he loved me and how much he liked me being his coach... it was powerful. We were on the same couch, about three feet apart. And so he had to literally move about three feet. Then it was a mutual coming together. He said something like, "I'm really sorry, Dad. I should have treated you better. I should have talked to you more. I will include you in my life." I had my arms around him and he had his head on my chest. I gave him verbal assurance that he's special and he's important, that he is loved. He doesn't like to cry, you don't see him cry very often. So it was a rare situation. He sobbed right there as I held him. He cried for a long time. And I just held him.

Joshua's story as he interpreted it: The forgiving touch as loving, as nurturing

When you have a negative experience with touch I think it takes a longer time to make it a positive. There has to be growth ... change ... it has to be gradual. One of the ways that I believe in parenting is that you never physically touch your children in negative ways with your hands... or with your body. For example we believed in spanking when they were

young. But we always wanted to use a neutral object so they wouldn't associate the hand with an instrument of pain, but would see the hand as an instrument of love. I feel very strongly about this based on the fact that my father used his hands a lot to slap you... or slug you ... or hit you. I can remember even in my 20's when someone reached over to just pat me on the shoulder my first reaction would be a flinch like I expected to get hit. Like a dog does with an owner that slaps it with his hands.

So I look back on getting slapped or hit because of discipline, usually in anger. Those were basically the ways of touch in my family. There wasn't much hugging or positive physical forms of expression. When you hit somebody, it's pretty hard to turn around and put your arms around them.

There's a violation of a relationship when, for example, you get into a fight with somebody... there's a big difference between a word fight and a physical fight. I almost feel like there's a boundary there. And when you cross that boundary, you really injure that relationship. Once you cross the line of physical contact in a negative way it builds a wall of hurt and mistrust and violation. So first of all I look at touch from a negative standpoint. From the negative in my youth. And it took me personally a long, long time to feel comfortable in positive touch.

Usually the touch of negative is associated with negative emotions, violence... anger... bitterness, resentment; and positive touch is associated with calmness, control, gentleness and kindness. When I began to associate myself with people who had a balance with God, with people, and with themselves I was attracted to the control, to the ability to handle difficult situations without flying off the handle and throwing things, and screaming and swearing. Control fosters trust, support, encouragement, and those things lead to a pat on the back or to an embrace.

The big break through is with children. To have your own children and to see how much they enjoy jumping around and wrestling. Then as they grow older it's just a natural extension of that.

Both my wife and I came from families where scores were kept, and there was bitterness. When my dad went off and broke something like a high chair, or threw something, or hit you... he would laugh about it later on, like "What a fool I was for acting so stupid." But he would never say, "I'm really sorry I did that, could you forgive me." It made you have more bitterness. There was no ownership.

I remember one time when I was about six years old. My dad was out washing his car. He was very fussy about his car. It was a real nice warm day and my brother and sister and I were out in the yard. He went to get his nozzle to put on the hose and he couldn't find it. His immediate response was that one of the kids took that nozzle. He just went absolutely ballistic. He would have hit us if we would have been close enough. It was just a tirade of swearing, and storming around. About 5 minutes later, and I can still see it, I'm standing in the yard and I can see the nozzle on the windowsill high enough that none of us kids could have put it up there. And he saw it. Then he thought that was kind of funny you know, because he realized that he had put it there. He didn't turn around and say, gee guys I'm really sorry. And I just thought, you idiot, why don't you grow up.

If my dad would have stopped and said, "Would you forgive me, I really crossed the line" I think his behavior would have changed. When you start humbling yourself and turn to the other person to take ownership then you discover you don't want to put yourself in that embarrassing situation again.

I remember when my daughter Jennifer was about 18 months old. I had disciplined her in anger and usually when she did something wrong I would be very calm; firm but tender. But I hadn't done it the way I thought I should and part of me said, well she's only 18 months old, she doesn't know the difference. The other part of me said I needed to ask forgiveness. So I picked her up and asked her to forgive me for being angry. We were living in an apartment and it was afternoon or early evening. She was doing something that I didn't want her to do and I spoke harshly, angrily. I pushed her aside and she had a real hurt look on her face. At that point I realized I was being kind of like my dad. I believe with little kids you should be on the same level ... your face about the same height, and so I brought her up to me. I picked her up, put my arms around her, held her face maybe 6 to 8... maybe 10 inches away from my face. She looked directly at me and I said, "Jennifer, I'm really sorry I was angry with you. Would you please forgive me. I was wrong." And she didn't say anything. Her vocabulary wasn't big at that time. She just put both arms around my neck and gave me a hug. That was a special touch. What I remember about it was, 'at 18 months you really understand and you received the forgiveness.' This turned a very painful situation on my part into a very positive one. The touch she gave said, "I really love you. I trust you."

Open dialogue is important in relationships, and when people withdraw and hold their feelings in it not only hurts their performance in basketball, but, the person on the other side doesn't know what their mad about, all they know is that there's something wrong. So you need to voice that. My experience in teaching and coaching and counselling is that people tend to fall into two categories. They take out their frustrations on others, or they internalize and bury their emotions and take it out on themselves. My son happens to be a boy that internalizes things, withdraws, and that's not healthy. He needed to talk out whatever was there. And he also needed to really make a decision that he was going to follow the same rules that every other player on the team was going to follow. When I

asked a player not to mouth off to another player or back-talk to a referee, it applied to him as well as anybody else. When I corrected that I did not expect to have resentment or standoffishness.

Forgiveness starts inside. You are willing to say, I choose to forgive you. I choose to hold it against you no more. That's a release. When you don't get that then there's tension. When you're mad and bitter, and there's unforgiveness you not only want emotional separation you also want physical separation. The question is do you want to be right, or do you want to be forgiven. Do you want a relationship or do you want brokenness. And if you want to be right more than you want the relationship then you can lay there in your anger. The beautiful part of the touch is that moments before you go and touch the person you just don't even want to be near them.

When forgiveness hasn't taken place we often want emotional and physical separation because tender touch and kindness and softness are expressions of the heart. You have to be an incredible liar to be really tender during unforgiveness, or out of touch with what's going on. There is incongruence there; to have tremendous anger or bitterness or conflict with someone and yet touch them tenderly.

When there is no forgiveness you could say the relationship either stands still, or it reverses. There are times when the problem gets worse and worse and worse, and that's why you have to have some commitment to forgiveness or eventually the unforgiveness overcomes you, you just can't find forgiveness in your heart. I think if you let anger run for a period of time, its a lot like a water faucet you turn on that is very difficult to stop again. You have to stop it and choose a course of action and expect new things. Rather than an on and off switch, its more like a river that cuts through a new path. That's why when you teach young people a given lifestyle, they need to be really aware of those

patterns, because they're difficult to change. There are times when I'm so angry about an issue and I choose to forgive or to let go of that anger, yet I have to work on it maybe a day, a couple days. Or I've been mad at a person that wronged me, and I'll choose to give that up, and then five minutes later I'm back chewing on it again and I'm angry with that person again in my mind. When you're angry at someone, you're mind highlights their weaknesses, and when you really truly forgive and love someone, you highlight their strengths.

I had three choices. One, I could continue to let the problem exist. Two, I could tell him that -- well, you can't be on my team anymore. Or, three, "Son, maybe it would be better for you if I didn't coach and you wouldn't have a father/son coach conflict. You'd only have to deal with one aspect of your coach. He's my coach, he's not my dad." I'm certainly going to sacrifice the coach, not the father relationship. So, I told him that as of that point, I was not his coach any more. In one week's time, I was going to inform the rest of the players that I was not going to coach any longer. And if they wanted to plan a team they would need to find a new coach.

I think in all my days of being his father the time of touch and forgiveness there was probably the most intense display of his love for me. It was a real building thing, because we've had a phenomenal year and many, many times he has let me know how much he's enjoyed our friendship, all the wonderful things we've done as a father and son.

I think a lot of kids would like to do that with their dad... it's a very precious time. I believe he'll have a good memory of it, that this was powerful. It was as meaningful to him as it was to me.

Your whole body is tense when there is unforgiveness. I think you even breathe differently and then suddenly you release that and then you touch. The touch says it is beautiful to be at peace with one another. I think it draws you back the next time you have conflict because you remember the result.

He came into the room and he asked forgiveness. But the first thing he did that showed this had really impacted him was that his sour attitude--it was all gone. There was a whole new spirit of, okay, I'm now ready to listen, I'm now ready to look in the mirror and see what's wrong with me, and Dad, I really want to open the lines of communication. Initially, because of his personality and wanting to be on safe ground, he started slow to see how I would handle his initial movement towards me. I just said, "Well, this really means a lot to me and I really appreciate you coming to talk with me." I just opened to him, gave him opportunity. That's when he demonstrated tears and a repentant attitude to the point of wanting to touch, wanting some physical reassurance. I think I could have said all the same words, I could have had him sit in the chair six feet away, or two feet away, or a foot away and said the same words, but it wouldn't have had anywhere near the meaning without touch.

If I was giving him something, it was comfort, care, concern. For meaningful touch there has to be a response in each person. If I initiate the touch there needs to be a response. If somebody else initiates there needs to be a response and so it's no different than if somebody says hello, and you don't answer back.

Touch is a very delicate and crucial issue and if you ever violate it physically... I mean you can say something really harshly to somebody, but slug that person in the face and the impact is incredibly different. I remember counselling a family one time, this woman asked her husband to forgive her and he forgave her and then he just gave her a love tap on the

shoulder and it hurt. It negated everything that was said. He didn't mean it that way, but it produced pain. So in this situation with my son, I could have laughed it off, or I could have squeezed him extra hard or I could have tried to smother him in my arms. but the moment was so important, not to be wasted, or ruined. The manner in which I handled that touch was crucial.

When we touch in forgiveness, I think we forget the physical feeling. When my son put his head on my chest, I have no recollection of what that felt like. I have a recollection of what I felt in the feeling part of my being. I remember how I felt about that touch. Let's say for example, I would have put my arm around him and he would of banged heads with me; that would of negated the experience to a certain extent. We may have laughed about it, but just say that he banged my head and that created anger, then that would have negated things. With my son's touch I told my wife it was one of the great moments of our relationship, of our life, because it opened the floodgates of a good, honest discussion about our coach/player relationship, why he wanted me to continue, what we needed to work on together. It expanded everything and the result then was a phenomenal year of coach/player relationship, dad/son relationship.

You have to use your touch moments to build what you're trying to accomplish. For example, let's say that my wife and I have an argument and we ask each other forgiveness and we embrace and kiss and hug and we have some tears and it really means a lot, but we don't correct the irritation that caused the problem to start with. If we don't correct it we will get right back to that irritation and if that irritation continues, at some point, it's very likely we will no longer get to the embrace, the forgiveness, the touch, because we didn't use the tender moment to build upon another level of relationship. The tender moment of forgiveness and touch can open the relationship to deeper levels.

When I am obviously in the wrong and I know I need forgiveness I feel low, I don't have much character. The way I feel about myself at that time depends on how I wronged that person. If its with my mouth then I'm mad at myself for having a big mouth. If its because I've made a promise and I've lacked the integrity of character to keep my promise, then I get down on myself for my weakness or my selfishness. The bigger the item, the more rotten you feel about yourself.

My experience in counselling and in my own life is after a touch in forgiveness there's a big relief. When there is full forgiveness and full touch, it's like starting all over, brand new. When there's forgiveness it's like a fresh, new day. It's optimism, encouragement, hope, freedom. But it is also very important how often this sort of breach has happened in the relationship. I know of families that the breach happens again and again and it just gets more and more severe. Then there's a big explosion and there's exhilaration and yet they don't change the action that brought the relationship to a point where forgiveness was needed. So in my frame of reference I think strong relationships may have forgiveness and touch and new action going on repeatedly, like once or twice, three times a month. Maybe even weekly. Over any kind of issue that requires it.

Out of a situation of touch and forgiveness I think the growth of the relationship can explode in a positive way. I mean it could be the difference between harmful words and beautiful words, between wanting your child to be in the same room or not even wanting to be in the same house with them. It's the difference between having a two-hour conversation non-stop versus sitting in a restaurant not saying a word to each other.

When resentment is going on I think it dehumanizes, destroys, it's destructive. You are feeding on each other's weaknesses and there are smirks... and shrugs, and look aways... and sarcasm. There is no intimate touch. There may be a harsh touch. For some it could

be physical abuse. But there's no intimacy of touch. There's no softness of touch. The touch and the forgiveness give certain things to the relationship... honesty... trust... oneness of heart and mind. You feel like a team. You feel like your own personal character is enhanced because you think the person values your character and you are worthy of being forgiven. Whereas before you don't feel worthy because you don't think they trust you in the relationship. Unforgiveness basically is saying I don't believe that you can change, or I don't believe that you want to change, or I don't believe that you care about me. And when you trust you are saying... I believe. When you ask forgiveness, you are saying I want to be trusted again. I want you to believe in my character. I want you to care about me as a person.

When there's forgiveness and peace and a commitment for intimacy, the touch grows and expands... it becomes common. Holding of hands. Arms around each other. A pat on the back. When there's genuine forgiveness and touch, further touch is welcomed. When there's a lack of forgiveness, touch feels dishonest. Offensive. The forgiveness and that ensuing touch can sometimes take touch between significant people from something that's offensive to something that's welcomed.

When you have anger and bitterness and you have let that build, then you have a period of destruction going on between two human beings. And that destroys you. Or at least you're being made to feel you're being destroyed. So there's a wound. And some wounds are quite severe. I'd go so far as to say it's almost necessary to have some form of touch. It's almost like buying a car and getting a receipt. The touch is almost a receipt, that I really meant what I said. It gives credibility to the verbal offer. I think we're built that way. Why does a cat want to sit on your lap? Why does a dog want to be petted? I don't know the answers to that, I just know that they do. And I know I see the satisfaction, and I see that with people. I see that with children. They want to be touched. They want to be

touched appropriately. It's affirming them as a person in terms of--I am special, I am unique, I am cared for, I am loved. Touch in forgiveness closes the gap between two people. It takes away that distance. Touch, during forgiveness, bonds together. It's a moment in time when you have an experience with that person that no one else in the world has. If I were to look right at that moment with my son--how many fathers in the whole world ever sit and embrace their son and he's saying to you, I'm so glad you're my dad and I really need you, and I really want you to be my dad and be a part of my life. And you're saying back to him, I want to be a part of your life, and I really need you. I really want the best for you. It's powerful. I think if every boy had that there would be a lot less pain.

Discussion

Joshua's forgiveness was characterized by two central elements. First, he wanted a strong relationship with his son, one in which communication lines were open and his stance as a father was not compromised by his stance as a coach. Second, he wanted his relationship with his son to be free of the cynical attitude his son was displaying. With the tensions of these central elements present, Joshua was distanced from his son both emotionally and, for a short time, physically. Joshua communicated his desires to his son, then he let his son decide what the next course of action would be. His son chose to admit his own fault and seek forgiveness. A forgiving touch ensued. In the touch Joshua comforted his son; Joshua showed his care and his concern. The moment can be interpreted as a father renewing his stance as loving father by responding to his son's request for forgiveness with a loving, nurturing touch. The tension of closed communication and cynical attitude from son to father was resolved in the forgiving embrace.

Joshua's story demonstrates a range of personal understandings surrounding the experience of the forgiving touch, yet in his story, as with each participant in this study,

certain dimensions or "themes" emerged. Universally, these themes may be most appropriately described as a burden lifted off, and a restoration experienced. Specifically, for Joshua the forgiving touch lifted the burden his son's poor attitude had brought to their relationship, and it restored the bond they had once shared.

John's background and how I experienced him

John is over 6'0" tall, he is 27 years old, and he is the first member of his family to obtain a Master's degree. As a professional, he takes an existential or meaning-oriented approach to mental health counselling. He enjoys working with families primarily, though he also spends time working with mentally disabled individuals who were severely abused as children. In addition, John invests time with the homeless, giving himself once a week to work with adults and children who live on the street.

When John was 13 his father died. John stated he struggled through many years of frail identity, pain, and confusion, but eventually his relationship with his father became the energy that propelled him toward his current occupation as a mental health counsellor. I experienced John as a thinker who explores the psychological needs of humanity and searches out healthy ways to fulfill these needs. He related he actively seeks depth in relationships and frequently verbalizes his own understandings of issues that lie below the surface of life.

John was 12 when he experienced a moment of touch and forgiveness with his father. John had accidentally thrown a rock through the windshield of his father's car just after being warned not to. This created a forgiveness crises for John in which he was very anxious about the circumstances and desperately wanted there to be healing in his relationship with his father. After calming his own anger John's father initiated a talk. The talk ended with John in his father's embrace. Our conversations took place in my home.

John's story as he experienced it

We lived on an acreage and had rocks on our driveway because in winter it would be really slippery, and I had a bad habit of just picking up rocks and lofting them up in the air. Like to pretend I was a basketball player or something. Of course my parents always said, don't throw rocks around the house. Well one time I picked one up, and I did a hook shot, and I scored the basket; only problem was I heard a big crash. I went around to find out what that crash was and there was this big rock I put through the front windshield of my dad's car. I just went inside and I said, "Mom and Dad... I'm dead." I was 12 at the time.

I knew my dad had to go to work the next day, it was a Sunday afternoon. So I just went in there and said, "Mom and Dad, you're going to kill me." My dad went out there and he looked at it and he went, "Oh my goodness." You could tell he was really angry, and he went back inside. I was still out there. And I just remember feeling so ashamed and so stupid and just mad at myself, and in my mind saying, oh your such an idiot. My dad had to go and cool off.

I remember my dad later on at night sitting down and saying, "You know, son I've had to evaluate this, and we told you not to throw rocks. But you did, and so you need to take responsibility for your actions. But I just want you to know that I've been in your situation before. I've done silly things like that, where I didn't intend to bring harm and I did. And I just want you to know that I forgive you for it."

That was a powerful moment. I didn't know how to respond. As a kid I don't think you do. I felt ashamed, and I wasn't sure if I could believe him. But the way he said it ... I remember him sitting on the couch and leaning forward and looking at me, looking at me sternly in the eyes. I looked down because I remember feeling so ashamed. I knew that he

meant to be serious, I didn't know if I could accept that. But I also knew Dad was serious when he said I forgive you. And those words were pretty sweet to hear.

Then he said, "Okay this is what we're going to do: you're going to pay for half, I'm going to pay for half." I just remember crying, I was crying and saying, "I'm sorry Dad." I was really broken. And he just got up and put his arm around me and gave me a big embrace, and he said, "Son, I forgive you." He put his arms on my shoulders and brought me in close. I remember putting my arms around his waist. I remember squeezing him for a brief moment, and then I put my head to the side of his chest. I looked up at him and he smiled... and that was the end of it.

John's story as he interpreted it: The forgiving touch restores significance and character

When I threw that rock even after my father had told me not to, and I knew I'd have to face him, there was a lot of illogical thinking. I remember feeling he really wouldn't want to be around me, feeling that he didn't like me, that he thought I was awkward, and stupid. So in terms of your own character you see yourself in a very negative light. You feel stupid, you feel ashamed, you feel dumb... and you see that person as holding that image of you.

I made a mistake, I did something bad to affect the relationship. It was my fault. When there is no forgiveness I think you wonder about certain things. You do not know in your heart if this person really cares about you. I think that buried in the heart of every person is the need for acceptance and belonging and to know that you are someone special in the heart of another person. And when there's no forgiveness... I believe those things are now in jeopardy. You suddenly do not know whether there was anything between you at all. Whether you yourself to that person had now become a nobody, someone who does not exist to that person. Relationship break-ups are so difficult because now you move from being this significant, significant person to someone whose just a nobody. When there's

no forgiveness you're no longer special to that person. And especially in your family, a place where you just feel this natural tie, you want to be significant. When there's no forgiveness it is all in jeopardy and you're no longer significant. You're no longer their very special son. So when there's no closure I think you're in a situation where you see yourself as not accepted by other people, and that you're not somebody special, and that you're nobody. It's not that that's truth, or that's reality, but that's what you perceive. You really believe in your heart if this person doesn't care for me, or if they don't want anything to do with me... then I must not be significant to them or to anybody else.

When I threw the rock through the window I felt totally ashamed. Totally stupid. I just felt like Dad was going to blow up at me. I could hear him ripping on me. You picture yourself getting beaten with a stick or something like that. You just feel so stupid and scared. I remember feeling like my dad was going to hate me for this. That there was going to be distance there. Feeling I was going to get punished and my dad was going to think a lot less of me. As a 12 year old I thought that for the rest of my life I'd feel stupid. I thought I was incompetent. That I couldn't be trusted. I do stupid things and so that makes me a stupid person. When another person knows you've done stupid things you have this fear that they're going to think of you as a stupid person. You have shame about that. No matter what I do they will always see me as a stupid person. And so that kind of creates a distance. You feel very unworthy and you feel like you can never meet their approval. You can never meet what they want you to become. Like they're going to laugh at you behind your back. You just feel very, very insecure.

I think you're whole tendency as a human being is that you want to be loved and accepted, first by your parents, then by others. You want them to respect you and to think highly of you. And when you do something stupid, like in that instance. All that just gets shattered. And you just become this stupid person in their eyes and in your eyes.

There's something about significant relationships. There's just something in your heart I think... the fact that this person is your father. He's your dad. There's that bond there. And he'll always be there. Like he'll always be my father and I'll always be his son. There's a bond there that you will not have with anybody else in this world. And to know that that bond is in jeopardy.... A father's image for me was important. I wanted my dad to be proud of me. I remember instances when he told me he was proud of me, and just how strongly that made me feel. I love my dad. If he said--"Son, I think you did a good job there, I'm proud of you"--nobody else could say that like my dad because there was that bond there. If my dad was proud of me, then I could be proud of myself.

Before the forgiveness took place I thought I was in jeopardy of being put in a foster home. I thought he wanted to disown me. I mean in your own childish way you think that. You think, Dad doesn't want me when I break his front windshield. That's childish but I remember thinking it at that time. But even looking at it now, if that situation were to happen today there would still be that feeling... like the person would disown you. He doesn't want anything to do with you. And it puts the whole friendship, the whole relationship in jeopardy. I remember feeling what if my dad walked out on me, or kicked me out of the house. I was worried I would never have the closeness with him again.

Without forgiveness there's just disharmony there, there's no connection there. There's anger that can flare-up easily. The connection used to be freedom, it used to be an enjoyment of the fact that you could be yourself and feel accepted, but now there are conditions to your acceptance. You're only okay under certain circumstances.

It was my mistake and he let me know that even though I had to pay for the damage, he still accepted me as a person. He still accepted me no matter what I did. Again, we were father

and son and he wanted closeness with me. I feared that he'd never want to be close to me. But after the forgiveness and the embrace you know that the person still loves you, he's still going to do nice things for you, he's still going to tell you that he's proud of you, he's still going to want to invest in your life, that's not going to change.

In a work situation where you have words with a person and you say, I'm sorry I misunderstood you--it might not be a big deal. But somehow to be held by my father, and to feel his forgiveness... in his arms, and around my shoulders, somehow... it just wouldn't have been complete without his touch. I heard the words, but I felt very much like a little boy inside. Like here I was this little kid inside that needed to be hugged, and told that I'm okay. And without that touch, I think because I'd known it before and had been held by him when he told me he loved me--not having that would have been devastating.

If I had thrown the rock through a stranger's windshield, certainly the touch would have meant a different thing. With my dad it meant that there was a healing of our bond. With the stranger it would be kind of an end to a contract. I did something, now I replaced the windshield, and now the deal was done. Like the close to an impersonal situation, a business deal. But it's a totally different realm when it's someone that you love and appreciate--you're dealing with human hearts and human souls. To a stranger just saying sorry and asking for forgiveness would have been appropriate. I don't think you'd need to hug that person. But in a significant relationship there's that close bond that we have, and somehow touch is so integral to that.

The touch was amazing how it spoke to the closeness. It told me he still loved me even though I was unworthy. Even though I was full of mistakes and I did things wrong, the touch let me know my dad still cared about me, loved me, wanted to be my dad... and

wanted me to be his son. It told me that things were okay. That dad and I were still okay and that I was still his son and he still wanted to be my dad. That bond did not change, even though I violated something... of his property. In the touch he told me that things between us were good.

I think there was a need for healing simply because the nature of the circumstances had done something to violate the nature of the relationship. I had done something that had hurt him and in that context there's a violation of trust. Well, probably not just trust but also a violation of expectations. To good friends and family there's an expectation that you're going to treat the other with respect and you want that back from them. And that was violated. So I think where healing needed to come into the relationship was that in spite of the fact that I didn't meet those expectations healing came. He was communicating to me that he loved me and accepted me and wanted to be in this relationship with me no matter what I did. And despite that I had broken his expectations of me, there was a restoring of trust between two people, that we could still be in this relationship no matter what had just happened. And in that way it was like a fresh start again. Things were like they always were.

I think the thing that needed healing was the fact that I now perceived my dad as being able to reject me. He could have done that because of what I had done. I had wronged him, I had done something that was bad and was really going to cost him. And the possibility of rejection was there.

So what the healing did was it reversed the rejection. I no longer felt that Dad rejected me. You see, in my own mind I had created the scenario that Dad rejected me. I don't know why my mind reverted to that instantly, but as soon as I saw the windshield I was afraid that Dad was just going to reject me... tell me I was not worthy, tell me I was stupid.

There was him there and me here and there would be no closeness between us. The healing allowed me to see that Dad didn't reject me. He accepted me again.

I think touch reveals ... I really believe this that touch reveals the truth or the sincerity of your words. And if you can forgive and there's truly a letting down of your guard, and a true openness to the other person then to touch them is not going to hurt. It's not going to feel awkward--well no, it'll feel awkward but it's not going to be hard or resentful to do. If there's no truth in your words, you're saying sorry, but they're very empty--then the touch is going to be cold. Your body simply can't be dishonest in that situation. Well maybe people learn to do that after a lot of years of just being dishonest, but I think initially, for children especially, it's hard to be at odds with yourself without feeling some kind of guilt.

I think touch reveals, or can reveal the depth of a relationship. When you touch people in certain contexts there's a handshake touch and no big deal, but I think in a context where your guards are down and you are touched, it's significant... it means something. It speaks a lot of openness between people. I think it reveals the attitude of the soul. Metaphorically, when we're touched by something it reaches to the deepest core, or to a deep core of our humanity. When something really moves you, you feel it. The touch of forgiveness reveals where things are and if there's that openness.

The touch is a restoration. It confirms. Somehow words between family members or close friends--words cannot convey what touch can convey. And in that moment with my dad... he could have affirmed me verbally but the fact that he held me was even deeper then what words could have done at that time.

The touch meant in that moment that I understood he totally loved and accepted me. And that he didn't reject me. Without question I knew that. Even though you have your doubts because your mind is saying, does he really mean that? To me when he hugged me authentically, it meant that he loved me. And I was significant and special to him. It said the breach in our relationship was over. Like it was erased. You wonder that before, that's a big question to you--how is this going to change our relationship? But now that's totally forgotten. Those questions are now erased. You now have the security of knowing this person just loves me and has forgiven me, and we're together. So you don't doubt the nature of it. I mean you're mind thinks, well, is this authentic, but you just know in your heart it is. Whatever questions you had before-hand about the actual nature of your relationship, you know now that everything is fine.

The significance of touch is closure. It gives you an image in your mind that when you think of that person, you think of that image that you have of them. You no longer see all the hurtful things that have gone on, all those are now softened by a touch. Because you have that memory, you feel that other person. And when you feel another person, that's a powerful memory, and in that way touch really does something in your bond. You are united by touch.

In the restoration of character touch is almost a natural sequence. Bonding is such an important thing. When you shake hands, it means that you're connected in some ways. It's like you want to be there. And in the process of forgiveness touch is a seal on things. A natural progression, a natural thing to do. I remember going to my father and asking for forgiveness. I was crying, and touch was that final element, the element that made me fully secure in the fact that things were okay between my father and I. It was like he said, "You're forgiven, and I was disappointed, but that's over with and it's a clean start." Those words were great, and we could have ended it there. But it seemed a natural thing

for me to go to my dad and give him a hug. It was a final seal, like the signing of a contract, the saying 'I do' when you get married. Touch is a very powerful sealing element. You make up and part of the making up process is to reinforce it with touch.

In a contract we shake hands to seal it, and we kiss to seal the marriage. It seems we often touch to seal forgiveness. Yet I think there are certainly very salient differences between these touches--in comparing a marriage or a business contract to forgiveness. The first two are very positive things. Like the touch is just expected. But I think in forgiveness it's not. There's a hesitancy, you're not quite as sure, you don't know what the outcome is, and there's a lot revealed by that touch. In the case of forgiveness, you're at odds with each other. When you're getting married you're not at odds, it's just a beautiful union. But when you're seeking forgiveness, there's a definite gap there that both of you are very conscious of. So I think saying the words I forgive you, and that touch... it reinstills the bond that once was there. The business contract and the marriage kiss are examples of an initial seal. It's an initial coming together, setting the trend for what's going to happen. But the touch of forgiveness is different in that it redefines what was there. It wouldn't mean the same thing if you just shake hands after you had a good time together, or even give each other a hug... I mean these are just a part of that relationship. But in the touch of forgiveness it's significant because it's a bridge back to where you once were. It's a redefining of boundaries. There's been a couple of cases where the words forgiveness were said, but there was a coldness in the touch. There was a tenseness there and you could tell that things weren't settled. In that touch I remember thinking it was very threatening, it was almost a mockery. It was just terrible, it was confusing because you really didn't know where you stood, and it left you with the questions you had before, nothing was resolved. A true touch of forgiveness really lets you know, really brings you back together to where you once were.

Touch redefines a relationship. I remember thinking clearly that my father forgave me and so things were good between my dad and I. My father and I, the dad and son relationship was restored. We were once again in harmony with each other. Before it was almost like I questioned if we were even still related. Those are the fears that go through your mind. But touching says the friendship that we have is there again. The underlying father/son relationship is back intact but now it's deeper. It's not the start of something, it's the continuation of something. And so it reaches a higher level in the fact that you're aware in your mind that things did not have to keep going together. I mean, you could have split apart and that would have been the end of it. But it's a coming together so it's another notch, it's another marker that deepens the relationship. It's just like a friend that you've had for a lot of years. There will be significant events along the way that you look back on, specific memories that are locked in your mind. You graduated together, then you went on a big backpacking trip, then you went on a big bike trip... and those memories are locked in your mind. Forgiveness is another memory that locks that relationship, that takes it to a deeper level.

But it takes it deeper in a different way than say a backpacking trip. The touch of forgiveness is connected to somebody else. It's not just something that you do in of yourself. I could go backpacking by myself, but because my friend Clinton was along it was a fun time together. But an act of forgiveness is mutually exclusive with someone else. So it's a memory bonded to another significant person. The touch of forgiveness is not just an event that happened, it's a person it happened to.

I think that what forgiveness and touch does is it puts you on the same level. The other person doesn't hold power over you. You don't feel inferior. We all react in different ways. For me, when I feel threatened I feel inferior. But in the forgiveness with my father... for that moment we were equals. We were two people coming together out of our

own heart and we met as equals. As partners. And we saw each other as that and we loved each other as that. And that's what forgiveness does, it puts people on the same level. It's not like a non-functional type of forgiveness where a person says, I forgive you but I'll never forget what you did, and you owe me for this kind of thing. It frees you to be who you are without feeling you have obligations and that's hard, because the words of forgiveness are often misused. People who use conditional forgiveness don't understand what true freedom is... because freedom comes from forgiveness. Freedom not to oblige that you have to pay back somebody. Even though you have done something to violate them. Like with my dad, I didn't feel like I had to earn his love again. I could just be me and he would love me. When the forgiveness is not there, there is no freedom. I think part of freedom is feeling peace in your heart.

I guess the opposite of that is times when I haven't felt forgiveness in certain situations, I feel I somehow owe that person, I have to make it up to them somehow. And there's no freedom in that because you constantly feel that you're not good enough. You can't measure up to their standard of you and so you're going to try harder to get them to like you--give them something, or make a comment about them, or flatter them in some way--just so you're okay now, so you're still significant. And I don't think that's forgiveness. There's no freedom in that, it's miserable. You feel like you've done something, you've wronged someone and for the rest of your life you'll have to make it up to them. And you can't. You will never make it up to them. You can try. But again, it's a trap I think I put myself in. I can only go so far and sometimes people won't forgive, won't ever forgive.

In touch and forgiveness you can really gain respect for yourself and for the other person. Now you know you're stronger than the forces that try to tear you apart and that gives you a lot of confidence in a relationship, when you can overcome things together. When there's not forgiveness in a relationship, you're stuck at a certain level. You can never

grow, you stop. But when you work through forgiveness and say, I forgive you, I love you, and you embrace each other it's like you're going deeper. Every time there's forgiveness in a relationship after a violation, you go a little deeper. It brings you into a closeness again. There are forces that can tear you apart, but you become stronger than those forces.

Of course there are situations where a touch is given sarcastically. There's a situation where I'm working now, where there was a misunderstanding between myself and another staff person. We clarified things but not very well, and this guy kind of hit me gently on the shoulder--not to strike but as a way of communicating something, and he says, don't ever let it happen again. His whole affect and demeanor in that moment, if you'd freeze that moment in time, would say to you things aren't really okay. I'm saying you can sense it when it's not an authentic touch. And if I would have hugged my dad and he wouldn't have put his hand on my shoulder or something, or if it would have been a loose touch, or a resistant, or a sarcastic touch--I would have sensed the unreal nature or falseness of the touch. If my dad had done something out of character for him, like taken a stick or a pillow and kind of cuffed me across the face and said, yeah I forgive you-- then his words would have said I forgive you, but his actions wouldn't have. There had to be a harmony, a consistency between love, between his words and what he did.

If you really want to experience intimacy and be able to have the confidence that you can share something intimate with a person, you have to have that understanding and experience that you've forgiven each other. I think you can grow to a certain extent in a relationship, but soon you hurt each other; you can go beyond that, you can experience real intimacy after there's been forgiveness.

The process of developing a deep relationship is constantly trimming things back and being aware of the things that are growing between you. Forgiveness is an important element in erasing those things so that original communication between two hearts that originally sparked together can grow. I think it works that way in family relationships. There's two people that are going to be in a relationship, but there's always things growing between them. Unless that is addressed, it's very easy for things to just slowly grow dark in a relationship and before you know it the distance is there. Forgiveness makes things brand new. Like you start over again. Once you've been hurt in some way ... and once there's distance there... part of removing that distance is being able to forgive and being able to put that behind you and have the desire to go on. I know with my brother there have been instances where he's done or said something that's really hurt me. And then I noticed as I was talking to him we came to a peak in the conversation where I almost wanted to share--but then, the incident where he had done something that really bothered me was there suddenly. I thought of my brother and I thought of this incident, and I suddenly changed the conversation to something menial. Reflecting on that made me realize something had stopped me from opening up to him. There was a barrier there.

Forgiveness erases the barrier and leaves freedom to talk once again about the things you always talked about. When there's hurt in a relationship there's a focus off those things and you don't want to share. You don't want to get involved with that person because you know there's hurt there. I think the positive aspect of forgiveness is that it allows the freedom for you to be yourself with that person again. It opens things up. It's a trust to know that the other person is not going to hurt you. It allows the potential for depth to be rebuilt.

We all derive security in knowing somebody thinks highly of us. They make some comment about you and you realize that that person really knows you. That helps you feel

significant with them. Any relationship that you classify as significant, someone that you're really close to and really trust... I think there's that feeling of importance, a feeling that you are important to that person and that they want to spend time with you, and you enjoy spending time with them.

After forgiveness there's a reinstilling of confidence. When you know you've wronged someone you want to believe that person thinks you're a nobody. But after forgiveness... I can remember that with my dad, I just remember wanting to hold him. He gave me a big hug. The embrace reinstilled a confidence about who I was in his perception.

In my life, I'm miserable when there's not harmony, when I know there's not peace there. People can have parents die, and they're still very miserable because they're still tied to that relationship; forgiveness was needed but it never occurred. That person is significant to us and we want to be seen in a positive light in their eyes. I think forgiveness bridges that. You don't want to be at odds with mankind, with humanity. Part of my upbringing was that I understood forgiveness in my own life... so I knew it was important, the principle that you never left things untouched.

Inherently we are all connected somehow in soul and spirit with those around us. We cannot exist in total isolation. Our identity, I really believe is formed from our interactions with others. If I have a strong identity then I'm going to feel that others do respect me, that I'm a worthwhile person, that the things I do in life are respected by other people and are liked by other people. Again, the connection with other people. I don't think you can have a strong identity and be at odds with others. I think our identity is formed in our ability to relate with others on a human level. So I don't think it's possible to have a lot of hurt and bitterness and truly have a strong identity. There will always be a corner that doubts yourself because you're not able to have a happy, deep, intimate relationship with

somebody. If you are at odds with the people that should be significant in your life it's very hard to feel at peace with yourself.

It's probably a little idealistic to think that we can be in harmony with everybody. We're ultimately more critical of ourselves than anybody else. And if we know in our hearts that we've done everything we could do to promote love and forgiveness between a significant other like say a daughter whose been abused by a father, or a step-father. If we've done everything we could do I think there's a peace in that. It's still hard because a lot of who we perceive ourselves to be is what we think others see of us. If you have an abusive father, or a father who is a continual drunk... and he still is very crude, and gruff and degrading to you everytime you're around him, it's going to be hard for you to accept yourself as a good person, or as a worthwhile person. But I think understanding you've done as much to bridge the gap that you can and that the potential for a healthy relationship is there as far as you're concerned, then I think you can have a certain peace in your identity, in that your identity is based on the fact that you are willing to bridge the gap. It hurts when that person doesn't want to respond. It hurts deeply. But I believe when you know in your heart you've forgiven them and you've forgiven yourself there's a strengthening of your character.

When a loved one has wronged you and then tries to touch you before there has been a resolution you feel repulsed by the person. Just get away from me, don't touch me. It's a mockery of what's not there, a mockery of the intimacy that is no longer present. There's a barrier there... I mean it's like walking up to a stranger and kissing them--it's just not appropriate. You feel betrayed that there are things that are wrong and you subconsciously know they're wrong and here we are pretending it's right, pretending things are back to normal. There's no reality in that. It's just like kissing a stranger, there's not a

relationship there but you're acting in a way that says you're intimate with this person... it just doesn't make sense.

When I think of being connected to somebody, that means the freedom to be who I am and just that we can talk and be open and just be around each other. When I'm around somebody that I trust I feel close to them. And part of feeling close is feeling connected. I can talk about something and they understand what I'm saying. Or they want to understand what I'm saying.

My father's embrace opened the line to be connected again, made it possible to talk about what's important to me, and what's important to him. It said we are able to understand each other and we want to understand each other now. Definitely the whole forgiveness and touch means now there's a desire for that connection to continue, for that bond to continue, for that togetherness to continue. It means there were some breaks in the road, but those are patched now. So we can meet with each other. You know that in your immediate future, as you look at things you say, I'll be able to talk to my dad, I'm at peace with him ... I'm happy with him. You know the two of you can talk, there's just a good feeling that you can't foresee problems in the future. We can talk openly and honestly, and just enjoy each other's company. When you talk you know there's no tension in the room. No, as far as he interacts, there is a peace, there is a freedom to ask him anything and not be worried that there's some other factor that he is still thinking about.

Before the incident, my father and I had a pretty good relationship. There was a freedom, a happiness there. As far as the closeness of our bond, I'd say we were honest, we were happy, we were at peace. We were open to each other. And after I'd thrown the rock and I knew I had to go to him the bond, the closeness, suddenly changed. You're tense and you're stiff concerning, what does Dad think of me. You're thinking about that incident

and there are a lot of emotions. You are angry, you are sad, and there's no peace, there's no contentment, there's no freedom.

And after the forgiveness and the touch our closeness is the same in the fact that once again, I'm me and he's dad. We're father and son and we'll talk about the same things we always did. But there's a continuance of the nature of that relationship as we defined it in our interactions previously. So that's what is the same. What's different about it is the fact that there's a new awareness, a new recognition of who that person is in your life. Once again you realize, that's my dad. You are aware of the fact that this is an important person in my life, that this relationship is important to you and you're just glad he's forgiven you. But if you have to go through it again in the future, things aren't as tense. I think you realize what's at stake, you've realized who your father is all along and you know he's the same guy and we've been through this before. And you know we've got to address this or things will just keep being distant between us. Previous experiences help give you confidence. It also can be frustrating thinking, why are we at this again; it's not all good. But I think you remember having forgiveness before, and you remember there was that bond there and that's what gives you hope that something will be renewed.

Forgiveness is divine because it's not consistent with human nature. When we forgive it's truly not something of ourselves. It requires a lot of effort. It requires us to go against our natural impulses. The natural thing to do is to fight. When you're threatened or hurt, or ticked off or pissed off, you know that's natural. But something that's divine is something higher, it's a higher form of something and I think a higher form of humanity is forgiveness. Because it's bridging a gap. It's not natural. People in and of themselves will not just want to get vulnerable and say, I screwed up, I hurt you, will you please forgive me--that's not natural, nobody wants to do it. People do it because you learn it's

an important thing to do and somehow it's very spiritually refreshing to do it, but it's not natural.

Lack of forgiveness is selfish because it's refusing to admit that you're wrong. Refusing to admit that you have a part in a conflict. I think it's selfish in the fact that it nourishes the ego... falsely. I think it's selfish because it does not help harmony between human beings. It does not nurture humanity. And humanity is the opposite of selfishness.

Forgiveness leads to deeper intimacy because it clears or allows people to be free and open and honest with each other. It takes away the things that we are often worried about when we deal with other people. Like, what do they really think of me. And if there's things wrong there, if there's no forgiveness or there's hurt then you can't be open and honest with somebody. So I think it allows communication to be freer and it allows people to be themselves, to say things spontaneously... to just allow a person's identity to flourish when there's love, and openness and freedom and peace. Forgiveness makes a statement as far as the future of the relationship... that I want to go deeper with you, I'm not going to give up on you. We're not just going to go separate because we can't work things out. I think it says, this is where I stand with you--I stand by you. And that notion, that confidence in a person's mind is very important to intimacy.

When there's a lack of forgiveness I think we're not free to be who we truly are. We have to put up a facade--we have to pretend we're not hurt. We have to pretend that we don't care. We have to pretend that the relationship is not significant, and that's not freedom. The life of the bond, when you are seeking forgiveness... there's a vitality there. There's hope, there's expectation. I think we thrive on hope. We need hope in our lives, it's what moves us. In a relationship you hope for intimacy. You hope for a closeness. You hope for a togetherness. You hope for times when you can laugh together. So after forgiveness

in a significant intimate relationship we touch to seal rather than use a word, or a song, or applause, because again I think it's a mark of where you're really at. It speaks of the closeness of the relationship. It's beautiful when two people are at odds and they can come together so much that they can touch each other. It's my soul to yours... it's powerful. And I think anyone that's aware of the power of humanity and aware of the power of human interaction knows that touch speaks of the force of love.

A touch after forgiveness is almost like you're embracing the other person and saying, thank God I still have you. Those messages are exchanged that we're still together, honest. We're not apart. The words we said drove us apart, but we still are together as far as our spirits. When we touch in forgiveness, we're seeking affirmation that things are okay. We're seeking the hope again for a restoration or a renewing, or the hope of a good relationship again. We're seeking the approval of the other person. We're seeking their affirmation. We're seeking an end to our own insecurities about our relationships. We're seeking harmony with another person. To be in harmony with another person; I think that's what people really want. There's a lot of things that stop us from giving that, but harmony, the close intimate harmony that you see in a marriage or a close friend... it's unspeakable.

In the touch of forgiveness we're giving hope. We're giving something that's not natural to ourselves. We're giving affirmation ... we're giving peace. We're giving a gift of love to say from me to you it's forgiven. Our souls are given. We're refreshed and we can say, I forgive you and I love you. We give to humanity. When someone has harmed us and we forgive, we're giving our friendship back to them. We're giving ourselves, our uniqueness that they like in us. We're giving that back to them. We're giving our commitment to them, that we're going to go on from here. We're not going to stop. We're giving confidence to that person. We're giving hope.

Touch in forgiveness sets you free to go again, whichever way you choose , but you're free. You're free to go on.

Discussion

Fears of abandonment and isolation as well as thoughts of personal awkwardness, stupidity, and being perceived as "bad" created a tension between John and his father in which the forgiving touch became, for John, a restoration of significance and of character. John was 12 years old and he saw himself in a very negative light and feared his father saw him the same way and may remove himself as a result. John feared that because of the breach he had created he would no longer be seen as significant in his father's eyes. He feared he would go from a position of significance in relation to his father to a position of no significance. The forgiving touch was for John a restoration of character, and a soothing, or healing of his fears. The touch verified that his father had forgiven him, and that John was still his father's son. The touch gave John freedom to be himself again, freedom to move on in his relationship with his father.

Themes of a burden lifted off, and of restoration, are apparent in each participant's understanding of the forgiving touch. For John, the burden of appearing "bad" in his father's eyes was lifted, and his position as a son of good character was restored.

Sarah's background and how I experienced her

Professionally, Sarah directs a large marriage, family, and child psychology practice. Her counselling style incorporates goals and directives to establish effective short-term therapy. She teaches and supervises master's and doctoral students in counselling theory and practice. Sarah specializes in grief counselling concerning the death of a loved one.

Personally, I experienced Sarah as adept at interpreting aspects of her own life in psychologically and existentially meaningful ways. Her over 10 years of counselling experience are evident in the way she speaks of her love relationships, and the value she places on them. She is a slender, dark-haired, 37 year old woman who speaks quietly, with wisdom and confidence. Her eyes as well as her voice declare not only that she has experienced pain, but that she is able to help others in their own painful experiences.

Sarah was 31 and just married when she experienced the forgiving touch after a particularly difficult time with her adopted mother. Sarah's own parents had disowned her when she was 18 for her interest in social sciences as well as her personal belief in God. Over time Sarah was informally adopted into another family. Sarah and her adopted mother had similar family histories, interests, and beliefs, and in the more than 10 years they had known each other the two had formed a deep and heartfelt connection. Sarah had been married for six months and after a specific time with her husband's family she felt she was distant from them and felt as if she remained an outcast. Sarah expressed her feelings to her adopted mother. Her adopted mother appeared not to understand and responded to Sarah with a biting remark. Sarah was hurt by her mother's impatience and lack of understanding. Eventually, a moment took place when touch and forgiveness coincided.

Our conversations took place in Sarah's office. She was at ease with herself and her environment. At the beginning of our second conversation she said, "This topic has got me thinking. Some of the questions we spoke of are very meaningful." Sarah was intrigued at the significance of touch and forgiveness, as well as its commonalities and differences in the love relationship she shared with her husband, with her adopted mother, and with others.

Sarah's story as she experienced it

The time was shortly after I was married. I felt quite distant from my husband's family and quite excluded and I was having a lot of trouble because my husband's brother was getting married and there were a lot of things that really shone the light about how I was definitely the odd person out. There had been a shower for Mark's wife and I had been not invited, and found out through my mother-in-law that everybody else had been invited. I was very hurt by that.

I was grief-stricken about not being included in my husband's family. My mom was quite angry with me about this. We were driving home and she just said to me, "Something's happening isn't it." And so I said to her that I was very hurt by what was happening and that it was creating feelings that mirrored those created by my own family, my biological family. I told her I was feeling isolated and alone. My mom just looked at me and said, "I don't think that you could handle being happy."

I very much challenged her then; I was quite angry and it was a very immediate anger. I had never challenged her on it and I was very angry about her listening to my experience and judging it. She became defensive, which most people do in anger. There was a separateness.

When we came home, we were in the kitchen. I had been fairly clear to her about the fact that I felt very confused by her response and I felt that her perception was very old, very tired, and that I felt I had "graduated" from that. She said to me "I know, I think I was trying to be helpful, I think I was trying to help you to see that it's really not all that significant and that you need to hope that over time there will be other things that will be more important to you. I really think I was just trying to help you move past it because it was so painful to see you there hurting."

I felt there was a connection right then, there was an opportunity to talk about the hurt. I was standing in the kitchen. She came over and she hugged me. She held me as I cried. But it was the way she hugged me. It was very much... it was very much an embrace that I had grown to rely on and trust and love. I felt very included. There's always a hand on your head. It was more of a cradling. It was more a presence... that she was truly there, not to judge or to fix but to allow for acceptance. I felt she could just be present with me.

Sarah's story as she interpreted it: The forgiving touch as acceptance, as connection

My mom is an adopted mom. When I was eighteen she played a very significant role in my life and in helping me feel and be a real adult. There was a lot of similarity between my adoptive mom and myself. My biological parents had a hard time because I chose to go into social services and because I chose to become a member of a certain church. So they told me they no longer wanted to see me and that if I ever came home they would not acknowledge me. My adopted mother and father were very, very responsive to me during that period of time. They said there was enough love for me in their family. They allowed me to be part of their family. They knew about my family situation and cared very deeply for me. We'd become very good friends and were very accepting of each other's burdens. It's hard to imagine but the relationship was significant because it was a family where I could be and where I had no conditions. I call my adopted mom my Mom now.

My mom's biting words triggered some things that I felt were perceptions she had of me, that I was a sad person, and that I was always going to be grief-stricken over the loss of my own family. I perceived she saw me as someone who was unable really to enjoy the loving relationships that I had with people. And I didn't see it that way, I thought from a very different vantage point. I didn't think it had anything to do with me experiencing my

happiness, it was about not belonging in my husband's family, which was fairly important to me at the time.

There was a very distinct sense of both of us having our own interpretation of what was happening and I think for me in particular, there was a point of saying I didn't have to buy into her definition of the situation. I am not prepared to dismiss my feelings at this point in time, to say that I can't have happiness. I think this is a whole lot deeper than that and I am prepared to allow myself the opportunity to feel. She sought to put her definition on me, but I said to myself, I am not going to be marked by your definition, I'm going to have a life of my own.

As a child I grew up and was told that I was very sad and I would have people, strangers, friends, colleagues, employers, use a lot of names to let me know that I didn't have a smile on my face. So I grew very tired of that kind of situation and I didn't feel that the sadness was something that I could just put a mask over. I chose to deal with that, which was very different than what my mom has chosen to do. So some of it was being able to stand up to her and say, I work on my feelings and I will not mask them in the way that you have chosen to do. I think that what her reaction said to me was there was a dismissal of my feelings, which was full of old pain from my family of origin. But it also said that I wasn't good enough, and that's a key thing for me. I was a very obedient child who liked being good.

My mom was trying in her own way to say this isn't going to matter as much later so don't get hung up on it now. Don't allow your husband's family to hurt you. And I wasn't there, I'm still not there. In talking to people about their in-laws and the extended family, maybe such hurt becomes less significant over time. But it's over time, it's not something that's going to happen immediately. I wasn't there yet and I think she wanted me to be

there. I think after her coming to my home and observing everything that was happening there, there was absolutely no reason for me to not have joy in my life. So I wasn't willing to accept the definition she gave of the situation.

Her sharp comment said she wasn't available and that I couldn't share this with her. I wanted her to know me, I didn't want her judgment or rejection. I wanted her to listen and accept me so I was quite surprised when she made this sweeping generalization that I couldn't handle being happy.

It is difficult for us to touch when we really need resolution of our hurt. I think that makes us feel vulnerable. Physical contact speaks of intimacy and when there are issues in the relationship, it's harder to connect, it's harder to say I want to be close, I want you that close in my world. Part of it is a protection to us to say no, I'm not prepared to allow you to be that close to me. I can't betray the fact that I'm hurt and I don't want you that close. I need to know that this can be worked out before that closeness can occur.

I can't fake a touch in that situation. If there is emotional hurt happening, there isn't going to be a dishonoring of myself to say there's nothing wrong. When a loved one tries to touch while denying the distance between us I find myself more closed, I don't find myself open. I know that even in my relationship with my husband, when he's realized there's hurt between the two of us, he has an immediate need to connect physically because then he thinks it can be worked out. I've had to be able to say no to this. I'm very willing to work it out, I will stay as long as it takes to work it out, but I need some space first to see that we're working it out.

I think connection between two people who love one another means love. There is mutuality, there is respect, there is an honoring of that person. There is a responsibility

that those two people take, towards the relationship and to each other. The biggest thing is an honor for that person, this is a gift given to me. I need to cherish the uniqueness of this person and not make them into something that fits me but rather be able to stand back and appreciate that person for his or her uniqueness.

The tears came when there was forgiveness and touch, and some of it for me was that she was available again. In the touch there is a connection saying this person is a kindred spirit. There is a relationship there. I don't necessarily remember the particulars of the touch as much as I remember the relationship. Conflict is what allows you to go deeper. Sometimes. Not always. So touching someone is going deeper. It says we can both have our own sense of self and yet we can connect.

In the touch there was a renewal of the relationship, an affirmation of my character. With the embrace what my mom was saying is, I want closeness between us; I am very concerned and I don't want to do anything to harm you.

To symbolize this touch I think of clay and the smoothness of clay. There is an ease, and it is a wet feeling. It's very, very connected and there's just a flow from that. In the embrace I received from my mom we touched on more than one level. I think we touched physically, but we also touched on a relationship level. There's an acknowledgment of the value of the relationship. I think that's part of it's touching. At that point in time. I think it is an indirect manner of saying this relationship is important to me and it's not one that this kind of difference will separate. We won't allow this to destroy our relationship.

I remember the touch because my mom is the first person who I could allow to touch me. And so there is very much a comfort in it, such a kindness, and there is such a grounding that happens with that touch and there is a sense of being cherished and loved. If the touch

would have been false I would have felt it in her body. There was a giving in it, and there was a wanting to have. There are times where you can hug someone and not feel... then it is more of a gesture to say I should do this rather than I want to do this.

If her touch was false there would have been a difference. I don't think she would have been holding me either. There would have been just a lot of casual conflict saying let's just let this go rather than save it. If her touch could speak to me, it would have said "I love you. I care about you." And in my response to her touch I wanted her to know that even though there was hurt, that does not abolish our foundation, it does not mean it is destroyed. Our embrace said we can achieve the same foundation, there may be a shift or a change in it, but that the foundation is renewed and remains strong. The foundation may change shape but the essence of it is still the same. The embrace said to me that we can withstand disagreement, we can withstand anger. It said both of us care enough about this relationship that we would work at it and not allow separation to happen. When we say a relationship came back together, that's the connection. It is symbolic of what actually happened: there is a lack of space between the two people.

She said, "I realize that this isn't the same for you. I realize that it took me many years to be able to not care whether or not my husband's family allowed me in." When she said this I realized there were a lot of things that were similar between us, and decided we both really cared about family. We both had good experiences in one family and not such good experiences in the other.

I had an openness to her at that point. I felt she was very sorry for how she had responded and I believe she was very sincere in saying, I think you're right, I have kind of rushed you. She was saying I am very different from the woman I was at eighteen. Closure means resolution. I think it's being able to say I have an understanding. I may not

necessarily appreciate how this happened but I have an understanding of why you might have responded that way and why I responded the way I did. And I think that reciprocity in relating is really important, that two people have the ability to say I didn't necessarily agree with your opinion of the situation but there's that mutuality and that ability for both people to take responsibility. So closure is about resolution and about being able to say that's finished, there isn't need to harbor feelings. There is often that sense of I can't remember the details, which says to me that it's really gone, that it is washed away.

I'm not sure if it is possible for forgiveness to take place between loved ones without touch. I have to speak for myself, I think there are lots of families that there isn't physical contact ... or at least contact is not a common occurrence. In other families there is that physical connection. For me to really feel close to that person there has to be the ability to reach out and touch them. If I don't want to touch that person it says there's something wrong for me. I don't feel as comfortable with that kind of intimacy until we've resolved our issue.

The embrace wouldn't have happened if we would not have been open to each other. There was a wall that said I don't want to risk. I don't want to risk hurt, I don't want to risk that you would not see me in a positive light, I don't want to risk having to say I'm sorry.

When we embraced it allowed me to know that I could have my feelings and that my feelings wouldn't destroy me. They would empower me rather than disempower me.

Touch has more impact than other forms of communication. When we celebrate things, when we grieve things, touch is part of making that more real, more true to what it is that is happening. We can verbally say something but when we behaviorally act on that, then

people have trust in it, and my experience as a therapist is that people can say a lot of different things but it's what their behavior shows and what they do that builds trust. It's part of how we remain grounded. My mom was a very demonstrative person. When we're at home one of her greatest joys is just to be able to be physically present with us and that's not smothering. You just get a real sense of joy.

There is a love and an intimacy that makes touch significant. We need touch from our loved ones. There is a great amount of trust and there are personal values that go along with it. The touch was a healing experience; that we could still be very close and yet have differences. Both of us had kind of come to terms with what it was that had happened.

If my mother had written me a letter seeking forgiveness it would have been different than the embrace. There isn't as much gentleness and as much tenderness, because I think we end up having to explore when we are face to face and this mutual exploration is cut off in a letter. With a letter it's harder to have the emotion that's present in the touch, or just even in that kind of space that we shared as we talked. There is a space. There is an intimacy in that space. There is something about the foundation of the relationship and I guess in my intimate relationships I don't have a sense that conflict is going to destroy. And so there is a space that happens when there is a difference or a disagreement or a conflict, but there's something that holds you there, that says you can stay here and still stay despite our disagreement. There is understanding, there may not necessarily be agreement but there is an understanding of each other's actions, there's an understanding of each other thoughts. An understanding that there isn't any malice intended, that though we may not be conscious of our actions there is somehow some sense of trying to help each other. My mother's touch allowed me to have the feelings she had formerly not allowed by her statement that I couldn't let myself be happy.

We say someone is out of touch because maybe they can't be reached. Maybe there isn't that connection. Maybe that's part of being able to say you and I connect and have contact about this issue. I think that at that stage of my relationship with my mom, having just married, there was more receptiveness, that being developmentally necessary, but I think that the touch was another way of saying we're different and we can still touch, we can still connect. So it was very much a sense of being able to stand from a different perspective but still have that intimacy within our relationship. And while there was a transition, there were still similarities and enough commonalities that the separateness didn't have to create a distance.

My mom has survived her life by being a real optimist, by being somebody who no matter how much pain she had in her life she went forward. And for me, I think my life is more whole, more real in a way. But that wouldn't be true for her. So it's not that she doesn't want to understand... it's that her own coping mechanisms say, if I did that then I wouldn't be able to cope. I wouldn't be able to function. And therefore, I can't value that way of looking at the world. If I valued that then I couldn't survive and live strong in my own life.

But all these are the deeper personality issues in our relationship. In my experience of touch with her the hurt was resolved. I think it was the depth of her embrace that resolved the hurt. There was a real sincerity in the way she touched me. It wasn't a distancing touch, it was a connecting touch. I felt she really cared... there wasn't a distance. In some forms of touch there is a distancing, a sense that we can connect but only to a certain extent, whereas I think my mom and I really made an effort, despite our personalities and our own beliefs about sorrow. I believe the forgiving touch speaks to how much a person is willing to connect.

We are touched by forgiveness in a lot of different ways. For me there is a presence of God in our lives and maybe that's some of how God's presence is shown. There is God within and God surrounding us; there is a presence and we sometimes put that to a human sense rather than to a spiritual sense. When we touch in forgiveness I think we're making a comment about love and about connection. We can attribute some of that to the presence of God.

When we want to communicate emotions like forgiveness, or when we want our relationship to be close, we touch. Touch is such a basic, or human need. I think it's more powerful than other forms of communication. There is something more in our touch. Our language fills us in so many ways, in order to express the depth of what we are truly feeling both in our hurt and in our love and in our joy... I think that sometimes there aren't words. Touch is one way we can say something in a much more meaningful way than with words. There is something very nurturing and very comforting about touch. And I believe that's part of what we're doing, we're nurturing... nurturing our souls as we touch. Words fail at times to communicate the power of our emotions.

Discussion

Sarah felt unaccepted by her family of origin. After her parents disowned her, their relationship ceased to exist in any nurturing way. In her relationship with her adopted mother, however, Sarah had found the nurturance and the acceptance she desired. Thus, when she suddenly felt judged by her adopted mother a crises emerged which created emotional distance. This distance was dissolved in the forgiving touch. In this touch Sarah felt nurtured and accepted once again. The touch re-established the connection Sarah valued, a connection in which she was loved, respected, and cared for by her adopted mother in an environment that was free of judgment.

Sarah was wounded emotionally by her mother's sharp words. A distance came to the relationship, altering its nature. Thematically, Sarah's experience reflected the lifting of a burden of hurt felt between her and her mother, and the restoration of the nurturing bond they had formerly shared.

Joseph's background and how I experienced him

Joseph was abandoned by his mother at an early age and he grew up angry, ever ready to fight with his peers. As he grew older he poured much of his emotion into athletics and slowly let go of the volatile emotions surrounding his abandonment. Joseph went on to receive a basketball scholarship that paid for his college education. He chose to study psychology, a reflection of many of the choices he had made to change a life of anger and bitterness to a life of forgiveness and health.

As a young Native American male, Joseph committed himself to breaking the stereotypes surrounding his culture. Joseph also committed himself to relational strength, self-confidence, and belief in Jesus Christ. Joseph possesses a great charisma which is enhanced by a powerful 6'4" frame, a gentle voice, raven hair, elevated cheekbones, and piercing eyes.

Joseph was 19 when he experienced a moment of touch and forgiveness with his biological mother who had abandoned him at age 3. Joseph is a quiet man who speaks softly but with self-assurance. Though his mother may not have known the significance of the touch, it was a very meaningful experience for Joseph. The touch of forgiveness was given consciously by Joseph to his mother and whether she received it or not was not as important to him as was his desire to give to her a forgiving touch. Our conversations took place in the home of a family with whom Joseph was very close.

Joseph's story as he experienced it

When I was 3 years old my parents were divorced and myself being the youngest of three boys I was raised along with my two older brothers by my father. He was a single parent and as a school teacher we had the opportunity to spend quite a bit of time with him. So I developed a really strong relationship with my dad and I loved him a lot. I just felt loved by him. When I was 3 my parents were divorced and my mother went up to Canada. My parents were divorced because she was an alcoholic and my father was physically abusive. She just went up to Canada and lived her life up there away from us and made no contact with us at all--she never wrote, she never called. So, I really felt abandoned. I felt a lot of hatred toward her. I had a strong need to be loved by my mother and to be denied that was really painful for me. I hated my mom as much as I loved my dad. I was hurt. It was like she was dead or we were dead. There was just nothing there. When I was 9 years old my father died and I was scared that my mother was going to come down from Canada and try to get custody of me. But she never came, she never even made an attempt and that was even worse; it cemented my feelings that she didn't care about me and she just didn't love me... and because of that I hated her.

The first time we ever talked on the phone I was 16--it was a really strange, awkward conversation--there wasn't much speaking involved. Just a lot of silent times on the phone, and a lot of moments of hesitation, of not knowing what to say and not knowing what to ask and just the basic uneasiness and discomfort. And at the end of it she said, "I love you, Son", and I could tell that it was kind of a searching statement, like she was trying to give me a cue to say I love you Mom, or something along those lines. I didn't have it in my heart to say that, I just said, "Yeah, I gotta go now." I said good-bye and as I did I heard her swearing as she had slammed the phone down. That was pretty traumatic for me because I felt that I should have been able to say I love you Mom, but it was just at that

point I was unable to. She was just a stranger to me; it would have been an empty statement. It would have meant nothing to me.

Two years later, after she had called me maybe two to three times between the ages of 16 and 18, an opportunity came up for me to see her. My older brother was getting married. A month before the wedding she called and said she'd be coming down for Henry's wedding, my brother's wedding. I was really fearful of that. I was fearful of this issue of saying I love you to her and I felt I needed to be able to say that to her because I had written to her in grade 7 and said I had forgiven her.

As a Christian I believe that if I can forgive someone it's only because Christ forgave me. And if Christ can love me then I can love someone else. I felt I really owed that to my mother and I wanted to be able to say I love you to her and mean it. So she came down four weeks later. And during those four weeks--in between the time she called and the wedding--I prayed every night. My prayer was along the lines of, "God, I really need your help in this, I need your love because I don't have any love for her in my own heart. I want to be able to say, I love you Mom, to her. And I want that to be genuine and I want it to be strong--not something that is just said. So I just ask you to give me your love so that I may be able to show her your love and that you would just work in my heart and do whatever it takes."

I prayed this prayer every night before falling asleep, for a month. At the end of the time she came down to the wedding, and I was taken aback by her appearance. I remembered her as a little child would, when I was 3 years old, that was the last time I'd seen her. I remembered her as being young and pretty, and she had long black hair and she was tall and she had high cheek bones, and being Native Canadian Indian she had dark skin and dark eyes, and she was a pretty lady. But the first time I saw her at the wedding it was

amazing, I was taken aback by the changes. Her face showed a lot of pain, a lot of years. Her face was just haggard--it was hard and there was no light in her eyes. Nothing that showed joy. There was nothing that showed happiness. And that was a day that she should have been rejoicing; her son was getting married. She was hardened. Like she just didn't show emotion, it was just harsh. She's a fairly tall lady, about 5'11" and she still had long black hair. You could tell that she'd been pretty once, but there was nothing now that would really be attractive. She kind of stooped when she walked and there was no confidence in her. That weekend we probably spent about 6 to 7 total hours together, during which I smelled alcohol on her breath constantly. I remember the night after the wedding we went back to the hotel room. She had to pick up some clothes, and when I walked in the hotel room it smelled like a liquor store. It was the stench of alcohol, of hard liquor, the same that was on her breath. I remember walking out of her hotel room and just saying to myself, it's no big deal you know, no big deal.

The next day she was leaving and it was about 10:30 in the morning. I remember standing in my step-parents' living room. Everyone had gathered there to say their goodbyes, and she was nervous, you could tell. She was kind of hesitant, shifting back and forth and I was also pretty nervous. I was praying the whole time to myself, just, God, I'm going to be strong, I'm going to be strong. I was pretty emotional, I was ready to cry. My mom stood across the room and... here's her 18 year old son, she's never been a part of his life, she's had no contact whatsoever, and she's never heard the words I love you come out of his lips. And I'm sure she's scared of rejection, I'm sure she's scared of a lot of things. We've never talked openly about her alcohol or anything like that, it was just kind of a skirted issue. Then she said, "Well, we've got to be going now, we've got a long road ahead of us. We have to drive back to Canada and it's about a nine-hour drive." She was making small talk and she was kind of at a stand still, she didn't know what to say. I walked across the room, took about three steps and put my arms out and she took a step

towards me. I embraced her and said, "I love you, Mom." It was the only time I had embraced her that whole time we'd been together and it was a real strong moment.

Even if she would have just stood there, in effect rejecting my touch, I still would have embraced her. But it was different than that. I could see the hesitation and I remember walking toward her. She was real hesitant, in her eyes, she was very unsure of what to do. I just started walking. I remember she took a half-step toward me and as I was walking towards her I had my arms out and I was looking into her eyes. In the beginning of the embrace I said to her, "I love you, Mom." My left arm was underneath her right arm and my right arm would be on top of her shoulder. Her hair was kind of in my face, it was real close. So our bodies were close to one another and I remember having my hand on her back and just squeezing her to me, and holding her strongly for a few seconds. I made sure that it felt strong, not weak. It was like the ending part of the story of forgiveness--for my forgiveness of her you know. It was just healing for me to reach out and say, I love you Mom. It was like I was saying I forgive you, I love you... it's okay.

Joseph's story as he interpreted it: The forgiving touch that releases past pain

After my father died and my mother showed no interest in custody I was taken in by a Christian family--my brother and I were raised by them and when I was 16 years old we got a phone call. My mother had called my step-father at work and said in a drunken voice "I want my sons back." When we had gone to live with the O'Neil's they had made themselves legal guardians so that she could not come and take us away. I was fearful that I was going to be taken away from the O'Neil's to live with her . I had a fear of being with her because I didn't feel loved, I didn't know what it would be like and I wanted to stay with the O'Neils.

So I was 16 years old the first time we had any contact from my mother. That was not the first time I had tried to make contact though. I had tried when I was in the 7th grade. I had gone to a summer sports camp called Northwest Basketball Camp and I heard a speaker there share some things that really hit me hard. One thing he shared was that the thing you hate the most is the thing that you will become like. Knowing I had deep seeded hatred for my mom, and knowing that she was an alcoholic and the fact that I'm a Native American Indian may predispose me to become an alcoholic, I really feared that I might become like her if I didn't work through my feelings. Unless I chose to forgive her then I would most likely become like her. So I wrote a letter to her.

I was pretty young at the time and I probably could have done a lot better job of saying what I did but that's probably the best way I knew how to say it at the time. As the years have gone by I've had to come to terms with different aspects of that forgiveness and the reconciliation with my mother. I had the opportunity to come to a place where I was in contact with a lot of people who really knew how to love, and a lot of people that really loved life, and lived life strongly and knew the aspects and principles of forgiveness. They ministered to me in my heart and so I was able to get some kind of mild counselling growing up. But when I was 16, even though I had written this letter as a 7th grader I still had a lot of feelings and a lot of hurt there, unresolved emotions. There were some issues there that needed to be settled. And I never once said I love you to my mother, I just said I forgive you. And I think those are two different things for me. I really believed that I could forgive her but that didn't mean that I loved her.

To me, when I made the decision to walk across that room and embrace her, it didn't matter what she did. It didn't even enter my mind that she might reject me, that wasn't even a fear of mine. There was no fear in me walking across the room. There was nothing at all that made me hesitate. I had a purpose and I knew I was going to be able to do what I needed

to do and it was going to be good. It was going to be really healing for her and for myself. I think it was good for her because it was the first time she'd ever heard me say I love you. That was the first embrace we ever had too. I'm sure that met some of her needs.

If I had not embraced her I would have felt like the words, I love you, were just lip service and not genuine. It was an act of love to embrace her, an action of love. If I had not embraced her, I don't think that she would have felt that as strongly, and I would not have felt like I did after I had embraced her.

The embrace had a lot to do with forgiveness of all those years of abandonment and pain, and hatred towards her. It was like I was healing her. I felt she had a lot of pain too, and I felt sorry for her. She'd had a hard life as evidenced by her face; she's got a lot of scars you know. And a lot of those scars are because of what she did, because of the pain of living without your son.

As a Christian its real important to me to live what I believe. And I believe I need to show love. That's one of the greatest commandments of my belief. Especially towards someone like my mother. For me not to be able to do something like that would really show my lack of depth. I think that was a huge growth point for me. Maybe because I felt like I was beginning to put love in my life, to allow love into my life and allow myself to love others.

The touch gave her the opportunity to feel that she was loved. That her son cared about her. Regardless of what transpired in the last 15 years, I still loved her. I was giving her love and that's an important part of forgiveness. It takes love to give the act of forgiveness itself. I had a sea of love in my heart for her, but if I hadn't said I forgive you there was no way I was going to say I love you.

In the touch I was definitely open to the restoration of our relationship. If she had wanted to start a relationship then I would not have been threatened by that at all whereas before, like when she called the first time I started crying because I was scared I was going to be taken away. In the touch I wasn't fearful of that any more. I felt I was giving her strong love. That's what I was giving. A real love, a genuine love. The fact that she did not respond really to that over these last 6 years does not discount the power of the moment or the touch.

For me the touch was a feeling of affirmation in dealing with this: yes she's my mother, yes she's an alcoholic but at the same time I accept her and I choose her. Just because she's an alcoholic doesn't mean that I'm going to become an alcoholic. And I love her, I accept her, but that doesn't mean that I will accept that lifestyle for myself. I believe in the lifestyle that is of strong quality, love life, live in a lifestyle that is joyful, that has hope, that has faith in a higher power, God in my case. I believe in living.

The touch was an acceptance my mother. I can still love her and accept her for who she is even if she never changes. Even if she dies as an alcoholic I can still love her and I can still accept her. And she is a part of my life. For me it was a realization that my mom had no way of escaping that cycle of generational alcoholism among the Native Americans and it was also a kind of beginning. It was an ending of a lot of painful childhood emotions of abandonment. It was an acceptance of, well, she was really incapable of showing love. Even when I was 18 years old she was not able to show love really. It was not a relationship that you would call a mother-son relationship. There was not that strong bond. It was an ending of a book, the struggle of not having that love from her. It was also the beginning of, hey, I'm not going to follow in her foot steps. And it was awesome. It was like a new outlook on life towards my mother that began at that same time that the old outlook had died in the embrace. A lot of insecurities died in that embrace. I came to

accept my past and not be ashamed of it. Before, I was probably ashamed because I related closely to it like, this is me, this is who I am, and I could not really look at it objectively, I couldn't remove myself from it and make my own life. When I embraced her I was able to look at it objectively and say, this is my mother but my life is going to be different.

I had been dealing with those emotions of resentment and abandonment the years between writing as a 7th Grader and then seeing her at 18. There was a lot of years there, a lot of gradual healing took place, and at 18 the touch was a point of reconciliation with my mother. As I got older, I think I was able to work through some of those feelings gradually and by the time I was 18 I had pretty much come to terms with a lot of the abandonment. I had been given a home. I had been blessed with two parents that cared for me, provided for me, gave me opportunities to succeed in life and I had been around other people at Northwest Basketball Camp that also furthered that and really focused their love to meet my needs and to help me in my areas of weakness. Areas such as the insecurity that comes from abandonment. I'd started to believe in myself and not be ashamed but accept and actually be proud of my past. As a Native American Indian I had a heritage to be proud of. I needed to stay strong and be a breaker of stereotypes. It may be true that a lot of stereotypes of Native American Indians are based on fact. But there are exceptions and I wanted to be an exception.

After that embrace, at the point of embrace, my outlook changed on a lot of the past painful emotions. I felt I was able to not be ashamed so much of my past. I accepted my past... I was proud of my past after that. Whereas before it was an insecurity. I was insecure about the fact that my mom was an alcoholic and that she wanted nothing to do with me at all. And really, holding her for those few seconds felt like, it's okay, she's done some things for me that are very valuable. Number one she's given me life. And I'm very thankful for the gift of life. And she's given me heritage, she's given me a past that's remarkable. And

as I grow older I am able to understand and empathize better with people that come from the same background as I do. That has been very valuable in my outlook towards life and towards working with young people, and people that have hurts similar to mine.

I felt a lot of emotions in those few seconds of touch. I think my strongest emotion was of love; I love you Mom. I accept you and I forgive you for everything that you have not done for me as a mother. I think that was the strongest emotion by far. Another emotion for me was of maturity. I really felt like I'm handling this in a way that is right, I'm doing the right thing here. Maybe that was just my self-serving biases, but it made me a lot more confident as a person because I felt I was dealing with the situation in a way that a sound, strong individual would. I felt I dealt with it in a healthy way. It was a real warm feeling. I was giving to her a gift... the gift of forgiveness. Even though she might not even realize that's what it was, it was what I felt. I believe forgiveness can take place even though the other person may not even acknowledge the need for forgiveness. I believe a lot of healing can be done in one's heart when they give an embrace of forgiveness. As you forgive, things take place that are healing.

In the first touch I chose an embrace because an embrace is a real strong act--it's a real strong touch. It can convey a lot of powerful emotions and I think it's very effective to communicate love and forgiveness if that is what you want to communicate. How you embrace, whether or not it's quick, whether or not you've leaned into the person and pushed them back really quickly, whether or not you pat them on the back a couple times...it communicates. I think when you hold a person for several seconds, strongly, and tightly... firm, not suffocating--I think that's really comforting. I think they feel that's a place of solace. A place that's good, they feel safe, it's nice to be there. The kind of embrace I gave my mother was real warm, it was genuine, it was not fake. There's all kinds of embraces you can give, but I think the one I gave--she felt I truly did love her.

It's deeper than verbal. Touch makes it genuine, it shows there is a realness to what is being said or what has been said. If I had not said, I love you Mom, I think she would have felt that anyway. I think she would have felt that she was accepted. But if I would have just said I love you and not given her an embrace, I don't think she would have perceived it as real strong love. I think to give strength and to affirm her and help her feel she was loved... an embrace was the most appropriate thing.

It was real healing for me to embrace her. For so many years I had said that I forgave her, now it was the moment of truth, being able to actually put this into my life by showing her forgiveness, by saying I love you and embracing her. If I hadn't forgiven her there was no way I could have done that. If I would have tried it without forgiving her it would have just left a bitter taste in my mouth. It's hard to fake non-verbal, especially touch. There's some intangible aspect about an embrace that is very revealing as to what is in the soul. It's difficult to fake that.

It's hard to disguise an embrace as something else, or to change it or fabricate it into something it isn't. An embrace is very revealing of one's true emotions. Especially if it is with someone significant. We are able to play the role a little better with people we don't know as well because there are not so many emotional elements.

In the touch my soul conveyed to her my acceptance, forgiveness, love. You forgive so that you can move on and grow as a person, and not be held back. If you don't forgive you're not going to grow. You're going to be struggling through some things later in life that maybe you needn't struggle with.

The stronger the significance the person commands in your heart, the stronger the need for a strong embrace... the greater the need for a strong touch. If there's not much significance

there it doesn't call for much touch. Significant relationships call for stronger level of touch. You release all boundaries and you're saying I accept this person again. You're saying, I don't mind getting close with that person and holding that person and showing that person I care. I don't fear what people are going to think of my being close to that person for that embrace.

With my mother the moment felt very whole, very content. I was imparting forgiveness to her. That was the final step, not just the last thing I'm going to do but I actually felt the feeling of forgiveness. For the years of abandonment, of being rejected by her... it was like a weight had been lifted. My heart was relieved. I felt... this is my mother and I love her and I forgive her for what she has done. I don't hold that against her.

It was the first time I recall us having an intimate touch of any form. It felt like the first time we'd ever really touched. Like the first time I'd given myself openly, unguardedly.

Touch is far more powerful than words. An embrace can communicate an emotional feeling and impart what that person really needs to say. I think it's a message of the heart. The best way to communicate with the heart is saying it through an embrace. Or the lack of an embrace.

An embrace is the touch where there's no guarding. It's incompatible with guarding--you can't at the same time be in an embrace with a person and be guarded against that person. It's like trying to be worried and relaxed at the same time. You really can't do it. A person can say something... not with their mouth, but you can see it in their eyes and in the same way you can feel it in their arms if it's real, through their touch and the strength of their embrace, how long it lasts, is it quick, does it push away, does it linger.

It was a strong embrace, and I was a lot bigger than her. So I held her but I really wasn't focusing on whether or not she was giving back to me. If she would have rejected the embrace that would have probably just made me feel stronger in what I was doing. Like this is awesome; God is giving me the sweet gift of being able to do this because I would not have been able to do it on my own. That is one instance that cemented the belief that prayer is power. If she had not hugged me back I'm sure it would have felt different. I would have felt the same thing but I would have just said, she's still the same you know. It would have drove my emotions further to the point of saying, I'm doing the right thing here and regardless of what she does, regardless of what she's capable of, this is what I need to do.

The embrace was the ending of a lot of hurt really. A lot of hurt had been in my life because of her and a lot of hatred from being, as a little kid, a problem child in classes. I mean a kid would call me a name and he'd be joking around and the next moment we'd be down fighting. I was real aggressive as a child and I think that was because I had a lot of hatred toward my mom. Growing up I had an opportunity to deal with those kind of things. When I gave her that embrace it was like this part is finished. I can say I forgive you and I love you. To be able to say I love you was the final step of forgiveness. It was almost like I said it a long time ago as a 7th Grader, I forgive you Mother, but just because you say it doesn't mean that you're over it . I mean all those years, it was a slow gradual process. I think the act of the embrace was the culmination of the letter that originated in the 7th Grade.

I've seen my mother once since the wedding. We also embraced the second time and I remember there were definitely different feelings. I remember the first one was totally powerful, just strong. A lot of feelings, a lot of resolution was going on. But the second one was different. In the second one it was like, see you later, bye, love you Mom. I gave

her a hug, but it was a real light-hearted embrace. It didn't have the significance of the first one because the first one was an act of forgiveness. It was an act of love to be able to say I love you. I very easily could have just spurned her but instead I walked across the room and told her I loved her and embraced her, and said some kind words to her. If I had not forgiven her I would not have hugged her. I think I would have stayed bitter. I would have stayed ashamed of her. I would have felt the same way, ashamed that she doesn't call, she doesn't write, ashamed that she's alcoholic, ashamed of her appearance, ashamed of everything about her. But I think that when I said I love you and gave her that embrace I was no longer ashamed of who she was. I was no longer ashamed of anything she was capable of doing. I wasn't ashamed of that any more. It was like we were two different people. After the embrace it was like we were different people and I went on with my life differently.

She may never change, and at this point she has not changed. She still hasn't written. She still hasn't called. In fact I have made two trips to Canada to see her. One of which has been successful in my attempts to actually have a face-to-face meeting with her. The first time I went up she avoided meeting with me. Instead, she went on a drinking binge and was gone for almost three weeks. It hurt, it really hurt and I remember crying about it. It was three years ago. I cried... it was a different cry. I mean I was sad not because it hurt me, but I was sad that she was just totally enslaved to alcohol. I really saw her hopelessness. That's what hurt. That's when I started to realize that she may never change--it was more feelings of empathy for her and I felt compassion for her. Compassion that she was unable to do a lot of things that were so vital to living life and to loving life. And enjoying life, a good quality of life. She was trapped and I made efforts to reach out to her but she was unable to reciprocate. Two summers ago I made a trip up there again and I was really hoping I was going to get a chance to see her this time. So when I went up I didn't tell anyone that I was coming. So she had no knowledge, no prior knowledge that

I was planning on coming. I figured if she didn't know I was coming then she would be around when I showed up, and that's what happened. I drove about 16 hours one way to the place where she was living at the time. And a lot of people were there, I had no clue who they were, but they were my relatives, cousins, and so forth, second cousins and a few nieces and nephews and actually a few half-brothers. My mother had had several children afterwards. I just walked straight to my mother who was standing in the house, in the doorway. Her feet were in the sunlight but her face was in the shadows and she was quiet. You could tell she was taken aback, just shocked. It was almost like she was numb with hesitation. She didn't know what to do. She was just confused really. Very nervous, kind of like she was fidgety. I walked to her straight and said, hi Mom, love you, gave her a hug and she kind of hugged me back and patted me, she didn't really embrace me like the first time. Obviously it was much different than the significance of the first touch which culminated a lot of the emotions going on.

If I had felt like I wanted to give pain back to my mother... I probably could have just totally disowned her and tried to shame her. And I supposed I could have felt some kind of satisfaction and some sort of revenge on my part. Like, you hurt me, I'm going to hurt you now. But instead I was forgiving her. I was giving her the gift of love. It's like I was saying, "It's past. It's over and I accept it and I accept you. I don't want to cause you hurt, and I don't want to cause you pain. If anything I want you to feel love, and I want you to love me."

It was an acknowledgment of the relationship that existed between us as a son and a mother. That bond had been re-established and recognized and acknowledged in the eyes of others. If I was giving her something I was giving her her son back... in the sense that I was giving my heart to her as a son and looking at her as my mother. I was acknowledging that she was my mother, yet realizing at the same time she most likely

wouldn't act on that and she wouldn't involve herself any differently after we touched. I gave her the freedom and the opportunity to be there. And for that moment in time she was my mother.

Discussion

From the age of three Joseph began to struggle with how to deal with the emotions surrounding his mother's abandonment of him. As a young man he lashed out with hatred, anger, and aggression. Later he learned to value forgiveness, not necessarily for the benefit of his absent mother, but so that he could progress in life and personal growth. He desired to forgive her and even wrote her a letter saying he forgave. The shame and fear surrounding his relationship to his mother culminated when she called and threatened to come and take him away from his adopted family. He was 16, and the fear of her threat raised the tension that had existed between them for so long. Yet Joseph truly desired to forgive his mother, and two years later when given opportunity to see her he wanted to communicate his forgiveness by saying "I love you" and by embracing her. The embrace was for Joshua the ending part of his story of forgiveness. Whether or not his mother knew just how important the touch was to him, Joseph saw the touch as an acceptance of her despite her faults, a verification that he had forgiven her, and a beginning of life free of the pain of abandonment. The forgiving touch released past pain, it ended a long and hurtful experience. The touch was a beginning, a moving on.

In a decisive moment, Joseph was willing to set down his painful emotion and touch his mother in love. His story can be represented thematically by the following dimensions: the touch lifted the burden of many years of pain that had risen from his mother's abandonment of him, and the touch reflected the restoration of his own sense of identity.

Miriam's background and how I experienced her

Miriam is an elegant 53 year old woman with a slender frame and small hands that often move with her speech to illustrate a memory or add force to an idea. At age 45 she returned to university to obtain a master's degree in a mental health-related field. After receiving her degree she began working as a drug and alcohol rehabilitation counsellor. Counselling people she referred to as "hard" and "broken" is a challenge Miriam faces with compassion and a grace that is easily recognizable in her posture and the boldness with which she speaks of her own past pain.

Our conversations took place in Miriam's home. In interview she threaded her experience with images and metaphors and often tied past experience to present experience. She spoke quickly and fluidly and related psychological and spiritual insights as she interpreted her own experience of forgiveness and touch.

Miriam was 43 when it came to light that her husband had grown emotionally attached to his secretary. Miriam referred to this attachment as an "emotional affair". Nothing physical took place but the psychological wound to Miriam was severe, a reappearance of the rejection she had experienced from her father as a child. After a time of separation, Miriam forgave her husband and the two embraced.

Miriam's story as she experienced it

One summer my husband had a flirtation going with another woman. There was no physical involvement there but it was very painful emotionally for me. He had asked me to forgive him and I decided to give it a week to decide my course of action. I spent that week walking and thinking and processing that forgiveness because I knew it would cost me something. I would have to be willing to be vulnerable to him again if I chose to forgive.

Because it would take away the layer of protection that I had put over that wound. It was a struggle, I don't think forgiveness is easy.

At the beginning of the week I was leaving, I was out of here. It's probably good that he had to be away on business for a week, because then I wasn't the one that was leaving, and knowing my personality, the wound of rejection goes very deep, and rejection creates a lot of rage. Subconsciously I think a child knows they don't deserve rejection, and if you are also continually wounded in that same area, then it brings up what I refer to as residual pain. It's not just the pain of the situation, but it's pain that has been built up for a period of time. So I would have left my husband, because even though this situation took place after I began to love and forgive myself, I don't feel like I had enough time in the situation to have the ego strength to be able to handle it and not see it as a rejection of me. I'd just see it as his problem, and so I wanted at that time, right at the beginning, to leave him.

To put it very bluntly, he was on my shit list. Right then there wasn't anything I liked about him. I felt I'd given him the best years of my life, that I'd worked like a dog to build our business. Everyone around us told both of us that I was the best wife he could have and the only thing that that girl had was him--like he'd forsaken everything to be admired and stroked.

Let me explain the situation. We have had a lot of kids live with us over the years, and she was living with us at the time, and so I watched it develop and for a long time, I thought it was just on her side. My husband and I had talked about it being on her side--that he really needed to be on guard, because she had a crush on him, and we had talked about that. She worked for us, as a secretary in the business. St. Augustine says, don't try and fool yourself that other people can't see what's going on. I feel that many times the people involved are the last people to see. But I was not the only one that noticed the relationship.

There was a lot of emotion going both ways, and she was really promoting it and doing everything she could to spend time with him and be in a one on one relationship with him, even in a crowd. She was always trying to get little conversations on the side going, and I wasn't the only one that noticed it. In fact, probably the thing that brought it to a head was one of his director's wives commented to him about it. She just said the relationship between them was not correct, was not right, and that he was the one in violation because he was married and he was older.

I didn't know for awhile which way he was going to go. I felt he was very emotionally enmeshed with her at that point. I didn't know if he was going to--I mean he has a tremendous amount of integrity, so I kind of in the back of my mind, I kept thinking, no, he wouldn't--and yet there was the possibility he might leave us and then go with her. I felt it was a big struggle with him, and you could see the struggle.

Then there was just this week he was gone, and we had to make some decisions. He knew I was very unhappy and that I was going to be deciding whether I was going to stay or leave. Our intimacy level had probably dropped back to about one. The breach brought a lot of mistrust into it. Fear. There was no safety in the relationship at that point. There was no trust in the relationship. There was no communication other than reporting of fact, of let's say, daily maintenance living... for example, about the children, or about decisions in the business, or things like that. It was a deep valley, believe me.

The embrace took place the third day he got back from his trip. We happened to be standing in the bathroom of all places. He came in and he was unpacking in our closet, and he asked me if I'd thought it over... if I was going to forgive him, and choose our relationship. I told him I would and he dropped what he was packing... and we embraced.

There was a tremendous amount of emotion involved. I feel that the deeper the wound, the harder the choice for forgiveness but the greater the healing from the forgiveness.

Miriam's story as she interpreted it: The forgiving touch brings you back into oneness

I grew up with a very abusive father. He was a paradox because on one hand he communicated he loved you, because he cared for you and provided for you... and you know he probably would have rescued me from any place. But on the other hand he was very verbally and physically abusive. He told me many times, the last time when I was 27 years old, how he didn't want me, he didn't need me... he said the relationship with his wife, my mother, would have been a lot better had I not been born. I grew up hating him.

And in the summer of my 28th year I began to learn about forgiveness and that if I didn't forgive I would become like him. And that I needed to forgive, not for him, but to free myself. And so that year, I began to choose to forgive him. In this process things would come up. I'll give you one specific example. When I was 16 I found a record that my dad had made when he was overseas. He went overseas when I was 6 months old and didn't come back until I was 3. And in those days they didn't have tapes, so they would go into a place and have a record made. I was helping my mother clean out a closet of linens and there was this record buried under all these linens. So I went down to the family room in our house, by myself. There was a little built-in book case that was probably 3 feet high and 3 feet wide that we kept the record player in. I crawled into the book case, in that little cubby hole, and listened to this record. He was basically saying goodbye to each member of the family because he thought he was going to be killed in a certain campaign. I made sure I was by myself because I was afraid of what I would hear. But instead, on that record he told me he loved me. And when I heard that he loved me, I started to weep. And I wept all day. This was the first sign of affection from him I had ever received and I wept all day long thinking that I was loved.

The next day, my dad had heard I listened to the tape, and he came up to me and said, "Don't take much stock in that record. People say things when they're going to die that they don't really mean." He came to me the day after I had first believed I was loved and totally negated that love with his words. I was probably feeling more joy than I think I ever felt in my whole life. And when he told me that, everything died and I hated him from that point on.

Okay then when I was 28 I began to learn about the principle of forgiveness. And it was really hard to let go. I mean even now there's emotions after all these years. I've learned that forgiveness is an act of your will. Not a feeling that comes. That it's a choice and you do it not only for the other person but for yourself. And I chose to forgive my dad. The sad part is he died when I was 40 years old and I was never able to sit down with him and talk to him about it. He never asked forgiveness for how he had abused me. Later in life he did say that he loved me, and then a week before he died he negated all the beatings and said, I never beat you, I only beat you one time. But at the other time he said, "Did I ever tell you that you were pretty? I don't think I ever told you that." So I felt like that was his way of seeking forgiveness. He wanted a lot more out of my response but I couldn't go any further than I had.

Even with all this I feel I have forgiven him. I still don't understand it. But I've forgiven him and the reason I know I have forgiven him is that I do not treat my children the same way he treated me. I have not carried it to another generation. The bitterness. If I would have carried it on I wouldn't have been really free to love them... unconditionally.

We choose to forgive by an act of our will and then our feelings follow. In our marriage my husband and I hope to be in a relationship in which forgiveness must be asked and

received. Rather than just saying I'm sorry, we feel very strongly that you have to say, will you forgive me. Because it shows a choice of will on both sides. That often brings a touch rather than just saying, I'm sorry, and the other person saying, yeah me too. Because there's no response there. There's no interaction. We practice forgiveness in our family in basically that way. If I wrong my husband, then I ask forgiveness. And if he wrongs me then he asks forgiveness. I feel that one of the reasons we can forgive is that we are loved. An example of that would be Corrie Tenboom who hid the Jews during the holocaust. She had been in prison and one of the guards had been extremely abusive to Corrie and her sister. And her sister died in prison. The guard came to Corrie in the end, afterwards, and asked forgiveness. It was a real struggle within herself to forgive. But because she knew that God loved her and had forgiven her, then she could in turn forgive the soldier. I don't feel people can choose to forgive unless they feel loved in some way. Because they can't let go of something. Most people see forgiveness as a letting go rather than a gaining. If you don't feel like you have something you can't let go of it.

During forgiveness in our family there's usually an embrace, a touch. And then there is a deeper communion, or communication with that person afterwards. It's not just a physical touch, it's a verbal touch, an emotional touch... and the barrier goes down. Of course it often depends on the level of what that forgiveness was for. We ask forgiveness so that bitterness is not allowed to build up. Often it is the little things that build up rather than one big crisis that deteriorates a relationship. And so the slate must be kept clean almost daily. But there have been times when... we have a king sized bed, and if we're mad at each other, he's on one side of the bed and there's no touch. And as soon as forgiveness is exchanged, then we're both in the middle of the bed. The way we usually sleep. And so that outward physical touch is only an expression of the inward touch. There are different levels of forgiveness. It's pretty easy to forgive someone for not emptying the garbage. It's not as easy to forgive someone for an emotional fair.

It's difficult to remember moments of touch and forgiveness because I feel that the principle of forgiveness wipes the slate clean and you're not a grudge gatherer. So it's more difficult to recall some of the more difficult ones because I feel the greater the offense the greater the power of forgiveness, and with forgiveness comes forgetting a lot of times. I don't feel that it happens all at once, but there's a process of growing and forgiveness and your feelings change over time and then forgetfulness comes. My feeling is, in order for a relationship to last and be more than just a shell, where both people die in the relationship, the relationship is still together but the people die... then forgiveness has to be a constant part of that relationship. Because the experiences that create opportunities to forgive kill not physically, but they beat the person down until the person dies... it kills people emotionally. If I'm hurt, I close off. Forgiveness allows me to open up again, and be vulnerable. If there's no forgiveness, then I keep that area closed, and what happens is a little later I get hurt in another area. Pretty soon I'm a live person but I'm really encased like a mummy... I have this psychological mummy suit that will protect me from being hurt. And so you end up having two people that have layer upon layer of protection between them. There's no intimacy because they can't be emotionally naked before each other. What forgiveness does is it takes the wound and it allows it to heal so that instead of the barrier it's open again. And it's a willingness to be hurt in the same spot again. I don't feel you can have that in a relationship unless you practice forgiveness.

I think forgiveness that is really forgiveness costs something. And it can't be given lightly. Cheap forgiveness means nothing. But the true meaning of forgiveness, the vulnerability, the willingness to be vulnerable and to be willing to be hurt in exactly the same spot again is what true forgiveness is and that's what the touch is. When true forgiveness takes place, when I finally chose to forgive him and to say that I would mend the relationship then there was a real healing embrace.

Before the forgiveness between my husband and I over the emotional affair we were definitely separate, we were separated emotionally and at that particular time, we were also separated physically. But, I think the emotional separation was the key.

If you have unforgiveness, you only see the negative characteristics of people, rather than their positive characteristics. It's very easy if you're down on them and harboring a state of unforgiveness to concentrate only on their faults, and how you have been hurt by them.

I think every relationship involves love, trust, mutual respect, integrity of character, and when there's unforgiveness the love is wounded. I'm not saying it's not there because, usually it bounces back on the level of forgiveness that you have exercised. But the breach destroys--it destroys. It's like an acid. It destroys everything around it. You're thinking is colored. Your feelings are either frozen in anger or numbness and you see no good qualities in the other person. And that stops you from wanting any other deeper emotional or physical contact.

I grew up with a tremendous amount of fear. I was very fearful of being alone, I was very fearful of other people. And so if you're in an unforgiving relationship then it creates fear in addition to anger. With my husband I was feeling terrible rejection. I was feeling terrible anger because I had done such a good job, and it wasn't enough, and so there was hopelessness in that, like what more could I have ever done. And there is always a certain amount of that residual pain, from childhood, that comes up.

On a lower scale, I feel in every relationship there are things that because of personalities have to be forgiven over and over. But when you get to a higher level of an incident like the emotional affair, then the trust is broken--I don't trust him, I don't believe him. There

are thoughts of, even if I do forgive I'll never be able to trust him again. If he did it once, he'll probably do it again. There's a saying from the Bible that says, "A brother lost is harder to regain than a fortified city". Emotional walls go up, like a fortification, and it's like if you put a hood on so that there's no skin, there's no eye contact and you can't see the other person, you can't feel the other person... and then try and communicate in a dark room--a pitch dark room. You have an isolation feeling, that even though you know the other person is there, you don't see who they really are, and it's all very distorted.

It's kind of like if you're on a journey and there's two paths. We were on separate paths, deciding whether we were going to turn off on some other alternative path or keep going towards the same destination. The two paths are supposed to be going in the same direction but they're totally separate and now they are not close enough that you can communicate. All relationships--somebody referred to it as the tide, there's the ebb and the flow of the tide. At that time, before forgiveness, our life was at the lowest ebb of the ebb. That's where we were.

I spent a certain amount of time totally uncertain where it was going. Then I spent time because I didn't want to forgive. I felt like I was giving something up if I forgave. That there was no accountability if I forgave. So there was a struggle within myself. My personal respect would have been eroded. I felt like I was going to go backwards and give up part of myself again. That part of me would die if I forgave him. Part of my self-respect would die. I realize a lot of people have forgiven a lot more than that. But for me, with my background, I don't think I would have come through a physical affair. It was hard enough with an emotional one. Because of the rejection I experienced as a child it was a re-wounding. Growing up I thought I would never be married because I could never trust someone enough to commit to an in-depth relationship, and I had tremendous resentment toward men in general, because of my dad in particular.

In a situation of intense pain we choose touch to covey that we want relationship over separation because I feel it touches the primal--the primal message of love. If you look at a mother with a baby. If they bond properly, there is a lot of touch, skin to skin. A mother nursing her baby, breast feeding. In primitive societies, the parents don't buy baby food, they chew up the food and then they actually, kind of like a bird, just spit the chewed up food into the baby's mouth, like a kiss. A kiss of ongoing life. And so touch is very primal, and if you have words without touch, it doesn't reach as deep a level emotionally as touch does. I can say, I love you, or I accept you, but you don't believe it until you actually see it and feel it.

I feel touch is the most primary way of speaking. A baby cannot understand one word that you speak, but if you hold a baby close and snuggle it down, and stroke it, it will be content. And so touch is a language that we learn at a very early age. It's also something we crave within. I know in my life, I had touch hunger. I wanted to be touched, because I was never touched by my dad. He would hold my sister on his lap and I can remember watching that and longing for it, and so I feel it comes back to the same thing--it's the most primal language of intimacy. All intimate relationships involve touch, not just verbal touch but physical touch.

So if I was speaking something to my husband in the touch I gave him, it was acceptance, forgiveness... that he was back in my embrace. I embraced him, not just physically, but emotionally and as a total human being, with his faults, with his strengths. So then he was accepted again, he was back in the relationship.

With walls, you can't touch. I couldn't have put my arms around him when I was living with the unforgiveness. In unforgiveness there is a distance between you. The touch of

forgiveness is a physical dissolving of the distance and that's symbolic of the dissolving of the distance emotionally. If you're in a state of unforgiveness you don't have to have physical distance, you can be sitting right next to each other physically, but you're miles apart, you can tell it in their look. And you can tell the same thing in touch. You can tell by the way people's eye's meet, or in how they touch, whether they're in harmony. In fact, reconcile means, to put back in harmony, and if you're in a state of forgiveness it's like you're both singing from the same sheet of music. But it doesn't matter how much you try and cover it, if you are in a state of unforgiveness with someone you're intimate with, it will be evident to people around you, no matter how much you try to physically mask it. If either my husband or I would have been lying in the touch we would have felt it in each other.

Your body language, your eye contact, tone of voice, all those are going to show, either harmony or disharmony in a relationship, forgiveness or unforgiveness in a relationship. The more you allow unforgiveness to be involved, then your resentment builds up and then bitterness builds up, and bitterness is very easily spotted. If there is bitterness between a husband and a wife there will be a lack of touch.

If it's a normal touch of forgiveness, then it feels comfortable. It's like shaking hands with someone. You don't remember the handshake unless there's something wrong, different about it. It's either extremely limp or extremely rigid or very hard or whatever. So I think that's what registered if the forgiving touch is false. It doesn't feel comfortable. It doesn't feel normal.

You don't so much remember the touch, you remember the feelings it evokes of acceptance, and love, and harmony, and oneness again. Touch in a sense, especially intimate touch--like parental touch of a child--is ownership. It's, I'm claiming you. The

hug or the embrace at the end of a time of forgiveness means that you are welcome back into my intimacy. I'm bringing you into my body space and I don't let everyone into that body space. It's very selective. I'm drawing you back into my body space, which makes us one in a sense, cause our body space overlaps. If you are in a state of unforgiveness, you're going to put a wall around you and not let anyone in your body space.

Hand shaking came into being to show that you are not going to bear arms. You shook hands right-handed, with the hand that you used to bear arms, and so by shaking hands you showed you were not going to bear arms. It's the same way with embracing after forgiveness. I'm no longer going to hold you out. I'm going to pull you back into a relationship, into my most vulnerable part of me.

You choose to drop the barriers, both emotionally and physically that keep the person out of your intimate body space. It's a uniting and a oneness again. When I say coming together, you're vulnerable with your arms open. Your vulnerable when someone is in tight. If you watch boxers, they usually protect their mid-section, and so what you're doing is you're allowing someone to come in and wound you if they choose to, by opening up, and so the coming together again is in allowing people to be in your intimate body space and be vulnerable. It shows vulnerability.

I think vulnerability has to do with primitive, primeval feelings within a person. When primitive tribes go to battle with their shield and a spear, usually the shield protects their midriff. Often times, they don't even wear a helmet. So they felt like--I mean this is what I gather from it--that that's your most vulnerable area. And if you read stories from the past the wound that anyone feared more than anything else was a gut shot, because there was no way in the olden days to do surgery, and so you knew you were going to die and it was going to be a terrible death. So you protected that instinctively, and I feel like even

though we don't live in a society that's primitive, we still have a tendency to protect ourselves and not allow ourselves to be vulnerable within our bodies, our intimate body space.

It's not just the physical touch. You can say would you forgive me and not mean it. And embrace and everything. There is a mental difference. An emotional forgiveness. When people touch falsely it's not true forgiveness, even though the words were said, the hug was given, everything. The missing ingredient was the willingness to be vulnerable again.

There's the verbal touch of the words. There's the physical touch of the body. But the most important is the emotional touch. There is something to that initial touch, when you've forgiven from a distance then you meet again. The touch will communicate whether there's been real healing or not. Real forgiveness.

Let's layer intimacy on 10 layers. 1 through 10. If you have a layer of intimacy with a person that's at layer 7 and you're apart, you ask for forgiveness. If you come back together and your intimacy layer now in the touch, in the acceptance, in the non-verbal communication as well as verbal communication is communicated at layer 2... you know that true healing has not taken place. So with my husband when he came back from that week... when he embraced me after I told him that I would forgive him, he knew immediately that our intimacy level was at the level that he had once experienced. Things were right with me. So when you talk about the touch of forgiveness I feel it comes back again to the willingness to be vulnerable in exactly the same spot that you were wounded before. And when you do that you're level of intimacy goes back to the level it was before. If you don't do that, if you don't experience true forgiveness, there will be a layer of protection somewhere and that will be communicated through physical touch. Somewhere in that touch it's communicated. There's a level of intimacy. You can tell if the person is

holding back. It comes back to this layer of protection--the lack of being vulnerable. When we touch people physically it's an intimate position. For example, when I was young and I had this terrible unforgiveness toward myself and toward my father. And subconsciously toward my mother but I hadn't even realized it at that time. I had an extremely large body space. I could never hug people, and as I learned the principle of forgiveness and as I learned to forgive myself and realize that I was lovable then I could allow people to love me. When you only receive abuse you shy away from physical touch. I feel that if you're used to intimate physical touch and you've been wounded, you protect yourself from that wound and it's an unconscious barrier that you put up as protection so that you won't be vulnerable again. That's why during a time of unforgiveness the touch has to stop, because physical touch is inside your body space. So if I have a lot of layers of protection around me I can't let anybody in to my body space. That's the thing that I see in people that can't forgive: they build up barriers to everyone because if one person hurt me then possibly another person will hurt me in the same way--and so I can't let anyone in. And then what happens is you become more and more isolated in the world and you experience less and less touch, and part of you dies.

Once you choose to forgive, it's like a crack in the wall, and a little bit of sunlight can come in and nourish the person. You can begin to see the person again in a reality based mode rather than a distorted one of seeing someone through a prism. You can begin to see their strengths and not just their weaknesses. You can see them as a total person. It's like a pendulum. Before forgiveness, the pendulum swings clear over to the negative, after forgiveness, the pendulum will have a tendency to swing clear to the positive, which allows you to see the person in a new light. You begin to see, yes, they are flawed, they're human beings, but they also have certain character strengths and things that you admire. You're able to see them in a new way. Maybe you're able to understand their own particular struggles. The reality comes in rather than just the fantasy of the person, after

forgiveness. A lot of people believe that love is infatuation and so they run around from person to person and they're in love with an illusion. When you've been through a time of forgiveness, it brings you to a point of reality and the closer you come to a point of reality, the more you can really see the other person as they are. The more you're allowed to see that other person as they are, the deeper your intimacy, the deeper the bond. You live in truth; yes, this person has flaws and yet I choose to be in a relationship with them.

Vulnerability is valuable because you can't have intimacy with walls. You can't have intimacy unless there is vulnerability. The more you protect, the less the other person can know. So the more you're open, the more the other person can know you, but also the more vulnerable you are to wounding. So I don't feel forgiveness is totally complete until you make that step of vulnerability emotionally. The reward for vulnerability is growth, community, oneness with others. The physical embrace is just an outward manifestation of your inward decision.

A physical cut is like an emotional wound. Most emotional wounds are not clean cuts, like with a scalpel. They're ragged and they have torn edges. For example, if someone loses their mate it's like having their right arm ripped off. It's not like having it cut off, where you can sew it neatly together, but it's ripped off because there's a lot of raw edges that take a long time to heal. Okay, so when there is a breach and the forgiveness comes it takes away the raw edges created by a breach, and allows healing to take place. It's like salve to a wound. In the situation with my husband the wound was marked feelings of rejection--of always being rejected, which I was, in a sense, not physically but emotionally. That wounds you and then the unforgiveness allows you to open the wound everyday. But when you choose forgiveness and let go of the hurt and bitterness or resentment that builds up, then that cleans out the wound. And rather than re-infecting it everyday with the poison of an unforgiving spirit, you allow it to begin to heal.

The analogy of a relationship is the two shall become one. If you're in unforgiveness you're not one. But the embrace, symbolically, brings you back into oneness.

Discussion

Emotional and physical distance filled Miriam's marriage due to an "emotional affair" her husband had with a secretary. The breach was compounded by what Miriam called residual pain: pain from the past that surfaces because the present wound is similar to the past wound. Miriam felt rejected by her husband; Miriam had also felt rejected by her father. Such current and residual pain combined to form a crises of forgiveness for Miriam. The forgiving touch was for Miriam a renewal of intimacy. During the breach in their relationship, the two were no longer one. Verbal, emotional, and physical closeness was absent. By giving her husband the forgiving touch she gave him the opportunity to be with her again. She opened to him again the opportunity for community with her, for oneness. Cast in a thematic framework, Miriam's story reflected the lifting of the burden of her hurt and the restoration of her relationship with her husband.

Peter's background and how I experienced him

Peter grew up the youngest child in a family of five. Each of his siblings achieved academic honors in high school and went on to do well in college. Yet Peter struggled. He failed grade 9 four times and was unable to complete high school. Peter related that he lived with a great amount of shame concerning his academic failures. Incredibly, through an act of pure determination he later completed a year of college-level course work and obtained a degree in Biblical studies. Peter is presently a blue-collar worker specializing in mechanical repairs. He is 5'8" tall with brown hair and a stocky, muscular build. He consistently flashes a bright smile. He is 28 years old.

Though he stated he is not as advanced as he would like to be academically, Peter loves to read books and thoroughly enjoys debate-style conversation. I experienced him as uniquely empathic and intuitive regarding the emotional pain of others and surprisingly verbal in his expression of his experience. He related that he commits himself intentionally to personal growth and development and to forming relationships of intimacy and depth.

Peter was 24 when he experienced touch and forgiveness. A devout Christian man, he had found himself drawn deeper and deeper into a lifestyle that began with pornography, progressed to massage parlors and exotic dance clubs, and eventually led to prostitutes. He felt tremendous guilt over such things and as he began to fall in love with the woman that would be his future wife he vowed to God and himself he would not shame her with what he referred to as his own darkness. He and his future wife grew more and more intimate in their love for each other and soon Peter asked her to marry him. She accepted his proposal and they carried on in a relationship that would save sexuality for the marriage bed. A crisis of forgiveness arose for Peter when a mere two months before his wedding he went to a massage parlor and was masturbated. The guilt that followed was too much for him to conceal. He approached his fiancé and told her of his past and of how he had shamed her recently at the massage parlor. She left town for the weekend to stay at her parents and consider what her future action would be. When she met Peter again she gave to him her touch and her forgiveness.

<u>Peter's story as he experienced it</u>

I had been indulging in pornography here and there. And a fair bit of masturbation. I went on this company trip and I was out in Saint Marie, hormones going crazy, staying alone in a hotel that night. I called up one of these call girls in the phone book... a prostitute basically. She came over and that was when I lost my virginity. The first time in my life; I hate that day. Even now it's very hard to think about because I hate the thought. That was

the grossest, grossest experience of my life. I felt very dirty in the act, in everything, there was no real heat of passion. She was laying there, cold. A terrible experience. The touch was incredibly gross. There was no warmth there, there was nothing. She left. I cried. Begged forgiveness from God.

So I went on through life going through different jobs, and different things in life, and every once in a while still indulging in prostitutes and massage parlors and the odd strip joint, those types of things. And through all of that still praying and seeking God and really striving to get things straight. I'd go for four months and I'd fall off the deep end again. There was always repentance, always seeking God, always begging him for forgiveness and always trying, reading my Bible, doing things that I felt were necessary to curb this. Why God, why can't I defeat this?

Then I met my future wife, Ashley. We dated for a while. We got engaged. Anyway the urges were high and I went to a massage parlour and that whole routine. When I came out of the massage parlor I thought, what did I just do?! My hormones race so much to the point that I can't wait to get in there and then almost half way through an orgasm the guilt comes. It's absolute pleasure for a man up to that point but then the guilt comes, and the thoughts: I blew it again; I made a mistake; I failed. I felt disloyal, I felt I had betrayed her. Ashley was not there at that moment for me to cry out to so my mind started to spend time thinking about it and the guilty conscience got me. I got heavy hearted. I knew almost the instant of the orgasm passed that I had to tell her to ever have a chance to be free from the sexual bondage--to have the freedom and know that I could be trusted by my wife, and to know that I could have somebody to be accountable to that would love me, and help me.

I remember my conscience killing me. And then discussing this with Ashley. I took her for a drive, she was wondering what was going on. We were very serious about marriage

at the time. We both felt it was just a matter of time; saving up some money so we could get married. I took her to the top of the hill, there in Redwind Park. We sat on a park bench and I proceeded to tell her what I had done.

I was holding her hand. I was very teary explaining this. I told her what I had done and asked forgiveness and explained to her that I understood if she could not deal with it... and probably through my past experience I expected she wouldn't be able to. I expected the worst. I felt destroyed because I didn't want to lose her. I knew how great she was. How wonderful she was... and I did not want to lose her. But I knew that in order to ever have a chance at defeating this I had to be open with somebody, and who else--I mean there was nobody else that I cared about. I had to tell her; I couldn't go on living this way. I couldn't go on living with this past that would inevitably get worse if I didn't talk to her about it. I had to tell her or I couldn't live with myself. I couldn't get married to her knowing I was hiding it all. If I would have continued doing that I probably would have gotten married, and I would have had a terrible marriage, and it is likely I would have slept around.

I proceeded to tell her. I had tears in my eyes. We were facing each other on the bench, I had her hands in my hands. We were sitting very close to each other. I remember telling her... there wasn't a look of shock, there was an extreme look of love, it just blew me away. I couldn't believe there wasn't the shock. I told her, and I was sorry, and I cried, and she embraced me. We hugged and she said it's okay, it's okay. She kept saying that. And she said I love you. And she kept saying that. Whether that was initially shock I don't know. But her response was of love and it was something I'll never forget.

I reached out to her initially but it was an immediate embrace. No fear involved, no rejection in the touch. A very deep touch. Love. Her hands were around my back,

touching my head, touching the back of my head. I felt instant forgiveness. I felt love... I felt like everything was going to be okay. It was shocking; I didn't expect that response.

The look in her eyes, the way she was listening... she presented herself in such a way that I felt acceptance and so when I told her, I didn't feel any distance there, in any way. From myself though, even though I saw that and felt that, I was scared. I always fear what people feel on the inside and present on the outside. A person can present a very loving and caring character on the outside, but I always fear what they are really thinking inside. What do they really think about what I just told them?

I thought because of my past experience she was going to be strong for that moment, and when she had time to think about what I had just told her she would get scared and say take a hike. It came down to a fear of what I felt was the inevitable. I was thinking, now I have to wait for her to come around and tell me what she really feels. I felt it would be a rejection. People need time to really evaluate what just happened.

We got back in the car and I proceeded to be a little emotional, because what I had done was very difficult to do. It was a definite lift, a release of a burden. It's done, I thought, she knows. I cannot beat myself up with guilt. I need to get on with my life and pray that she can forgive me and work toward that.

In the next few days she had a little more time to think about it and at that point she said she was going to go home for the weekend. I was put off by that. It was like, wait a minute, I really felt love and forgiveness... why the change? Then the fear welled up and I was thinking, oh no, she's going to tell her mom and dad. Now I'm really going to be found out. Her family will think I'm scum. I didn't want that. I wanted to be loved by them, I didn't want to be looked at as this person who was evil. I was afraid.

At that point she just showed confusion... having to sort out her feelings, having to sort out her thoughts about what was going on. She went home for the weekend and I had a really tough few days... on the edge. I was praying the relationship would survive. It was a crossroads, and I wasn't sure. I really wasn't sure at that point. Going through the embrace on the bench of feeling forgiven... of hanging onto that... and hanging on to our previous talks, but in reality that can all change depending on how this weekend was to go with her, and how she was to react. I was always praying; God work through this, help her to really be wise and honest.

I remember her coming home, coming back. I asked her how her weekend was. It was a good weekend and she told me she didn't tell her parents. I wanted to ask that, but I didn't want to sound like I was going to bite her head off if she had. We didn't embrace when we first met again. I remember coming to her place, coming in and not embracing. I remember her making me a bowl of soup. I remember us sitting at the table and really discussing. She said she just told them that we were going through a tough time. With her parents that was what she left it at. And her parents wouldn't take to pry, they were just letting her deal with this ... they respected her choices. She has a great deal of wisdom, and I appreciate that. But then she proceeded to say how she had gone through doubt on the weekend. She suggested getting help and I was all for that. I said I understand, I respect your suggestion, and I was willing to do whatever I had to do at that point because I valued her. I said, yes, and within the week I went and talked to our pastor.

That day when she returned to me I remember moving to the piano and sitting on the bench and just embracing her. I was sitting down and she was standing. She was holding my head to her stomach and embracing me. Her hands were around my head. I remember the love... knowing that she had worked through something very difficult for her. I remember feeling forgiven.

Peter's story as he interpreted it: The embrace healed me of my shame

When I went to the massage parlour even when I was about to be married it was just one of those times in life when you say ... where is life going? Where am I going? What am I doing? I go to church on Sundays, I profess to be a good Christian and people see me as a good Christian and yet if they only knew my life they'd hate me.

So I progressed. You resort to pornography and you go through life. I would never sleep with, or fool around with a girlfriend--ever. I wouldn't think of it, because of the chances of pregnancy. There's the chance of being found out. A secret life you know. So I went on with life and maybe once a year I'd get a hooker or go to a massage parlour where they give you a nice back rub and then they turn you over and give you a hand job. And I was going through times of fighting these issues.

So I experienced that, and then I went out with a girl for about 2 years. I thought I was going to marry her. At the time I was taking care of a quadriplegic, I was an aide for him. He was admitted to a hospital so I was staying at his place alone and there was a point where the hormones were racing again. I called another hooker, and she came over and proceeded to try and give me a blow job. I was tense and never ejaculated. Never. Nothing happened and she left. I felt gross and my conscience couldn't deal with it at that point. My physical relationship with my girlfriend was pretty physical, never slept with her, but still a lot of petting involved. I couldn't deal with it so I proceeded to talk to her about the situation... not really telling her about the past experiences but just this recent one with the hooker. We dated for about another month and she said she couldn't handle that any more and we broke up. I was destroyed by that, even though now I look back and I thank the Lord. So that was an experience I had with the non-acceptance of this, even

though it is a terrible thing. I was not forgiven by her and even if she were to say that she had forgiven me, well she just couldn't deal with it--and that's understandable.

Later, after more struggles and going on with life I met Ashley. We dated for over a year and were engaged to be married before I failed again. I went to that massage parlour. I felt I had betrayed Ashley, but my immediate thoughts were to God. Because of the struggle with masturbation and areas of lust. I am a temple of God and God hates it when we abuse the temple which is rightly His. I think God feels agony, God feels pain because of what we do. Whether it's sexual sin or any type of sin that disgraces God. I cried out to God begging his forgiveness for the umpteenth million time.

When I betrayed Ashley it made the growth of the relationship come to a crawl or a stand still. I don't think true growth can happen when there are secret sins, or something that has not been completely out in the open. You can't move on when there are things holding you back. How deep can you get when you know in the back of you're head there's this thing hanging over you.

If I could have lived with my conscience, which I'm thankful I couldn't, but if I could live with my conscience I just think it would get down to worse things in the future. And those things would have eventually drove us apart. If I hadn't addressed it at that point my conscience would have hardened and maybe I would have started doing things behind her back on a more frequent basis. That would have driven me further away from her. She'd be kept in the dark and then she wouldn't know where I'm at and I'd be living a secret life.

I watch a movie and I see a man cheat on his wife and think--Scum. How would I feel if that happened to me? I'd have a hard time loving that person. I'd have a hard time feeling that I could trust that person; that's what I think she would be thinking of me. Can I ever

really love this person, or marry him. Can I truly trust him that he'll never mess around with some other woman. Those would be fears I would have to deal with if I was her.

Before I told her, I was scared. I think she was very naive to what went on. There was a definite need for forgiveness because if she would have just accepted anything sexually... well, then what's the use of getting married. Let's just fool around, let's live together and do whatever outside of the relationship. But considering our beliefs about marriage, about unity and loyalty and oneness, it was necessary for me to let her know that I was not a virgin, that I had screwed up. It came about because of this massage parlor incident. I had to let her know about my past. It was something that I had to do in myself, to explain who I am and my terrible past, and to say, please still love me. I mean if the person you love isn't going to care, then why share anything with them. It's a point of growing closer. It was a painful experience but through that pain we have a strong relationship today.

At the time when I admitted my wrong to her we were very close. We had fun together; we enjoyed being together. We saw each other many times throughout the week. The depth of our relationship was to a point where we were feeling free to share things. But what I had done was something I felt would make or break our relationship by how she reacted.

She had no knowledge of my sexual history before I told her about the massage parlor. I'm sure she knew that guys are human and that guys look at girls, but knowing about my past ... no. Part of the reason for telling her was one to be accountable, and two to be open and free in myself so that she knows about me, and knows about my secrets and that I could start with a clean slate. A person wants to get deeper with someone and it doesn't matter who it is but you won't get deeper until you start to open up about your own life and about things that may not be all that pretty in your life. I believe that openness is a part of building a deeper relationship/friendship. And part of the reason for telling her was a

guilty conscience as well, ov[illegible]going to the massage parlor. I knew I couldn't continue the relationship from my end knowing what I had done. I was too afraid, I figured if I don't tell her, then I can definitely never, ever marry her... because of my own feelings, because of the way I am. I would be too scared that I would blow it in our marriage. I felt it was a barrier I had to cross to ever have the opportunity to marry her and to believe and have that accountability in her knowing about my past so it would deter me from ever doing that in our marriage.

I could have lived with her breaking up with me if I would have known it was an honest forgiveness on her part. But if she was going to continue in relationship with me feeling she couldn't deal with it, I would rather break it off than go on and on and at a later date still be struggling with this.

Ashley handled it wisely, even though it scared me for her to take time away from me, I think that was the wisest thing. It was just hard to accept because we both knew that marriage was in the future and I think we both knew that this was a situation that had to be resolved in order for the relationship to move on. She handled it very wisely, taking time away, and spending time in prayer, and just evaluating her own heart and what her feelings were... and her true character came out. She could have come back and I believe she could have forgiven me and not continued the relationship. And I think that process could have happened as well, and that wouldn't have necessarily been wrong. But she chose to stick it out with me and to in essence give me a second chance.

When I went to see our pastor as Ashley had suggested, I was in my work clothes, by myself. With him I felt I needed his acceptance of me more than his forgiveness. I hadn't wronged him. I just felt that he was going to be disappointed with me. With Ashley, I felt I had wronged her, betrayed her. I felt I had betrayed her love, wronged her love... I mean

my whole life of doing those things; I had robbed her of our first night together being married. That was an incredibly special night--our marriage night--but even through all the forgiveness and everything I did rob her, and myself... but you can't change that in a physical sense.

With our pastor I just felt love. I sang in church, I was very active in church and I felt that would change for some reason. I thought they were going to tell me I couldn't sing in church any more, treat me as an outcast, but there was never any discussion about that. That was never a question, rather, let's work on grasping scripture, lets work on having another meeting like this and let's work on being accountable to others. Just getting somebody to be accountable with was one of the things he talked about.

With Ashley I received her acceptance and she never backed down from her acceptance. She went through that weekend and came back and spoke to me. And her saying let's talk with Pastor John was not with a condition. She just definitely encouraged me to do it. I think if had put up walls against that then it definitely would have put up flags for her, saying, this guy might not be the right guy because he has things he has to deal with. But with my willingness it showed her I was truly remorseful over what I had done, I wanted to get help, I knew I had a problem. Let's get this fixed on a continual basis and talk about this so we can correct it, or curb it, and control it.

After Ashley embraced me at the piano, from that point on there was definitely healing that still had to continue, but there was never any bickering on her part about this, never a twinge of changing her mind. It was done. As if she said, we'll continue to deal with this, but it's over and let's move on. I felt her love for me did not change, it was a continual growth from that point on. It was not conditional, it was I love you and that's it. The forgiveness was unconditional and full. I mean it obviously required a change on my part,

but from that point on I've never considered the prostitute or the massage parlor or whatever. I still have trouble with pornography and with masturbation at times but through discussion with friends and with her that too is definitely being curbed. We are definitely having advances and victory about it.

People want their character to look good. People want to be loved for what they are, but they also want to present what they are. We don't want to say too much because we might incriminate ourselves. We don't want to have people see too deep inside us.

Ashley's touch of forgiveness at the piano said something to my character. It said, your a man. It said, I want to know about you. I want to know and care more about you. To me that was a huge stand for what she expected of a marriage. She expected me to be myself, to be me. That embrace probably took off so many layers of guilt in my life. It told me I am a man. I want to be a leader at home. In so many ways I'm not. Every day is a struggle of desiring to be... just a man, a leader. You can be a man physically but you can be an absolute nothing if you don't take a stand on certain issues. And I know there are so many areas in my life where I just let life flow, I let life go on. And when I say that embrace of forgiveness made me feel like a man, it made me feel like--yes I can be a husband. I'm not saying I am at that point, I'm just saying at that moment the embrace made me feel I could conquer the world, that I could do things, that I could build a palace for her. It made me feel I could create a world for her that would make her proud, that would make her love me even more. The embrace made me feel I could build our relationship so strong that nothing could break it apart.

Her initial embrace squashed my fears. A lot of them. But for me there was still fear. Because time will tell. Ashley has always been strong in the sense of loving me... even when I still fail now, be it self-masturbation or whatever. When I tell her... the look in her

eyes, there's a touch of hurt and that is very understandable and I hate it about myself that I am hurting her. But yet there's still such a warm love and she has never come across to me with hatred. I mean she doesn't like what I do when I fail, yet her look is one of love, and a look of how can I help. It's hard to put it into words other than she listens and hears what I'm saying and she is my love, and my support.

We have to embrace... to ensure forgiveness, to allow healing to happen. There has to be contact because if there is no contact there is rejection. If you don't embrace or squeeze a hand, or kiss or hug, or even place a hand on the leg, just a hand of compassion on the knee, then there is rejection. The touch says, I understand; I want to understand, I want to be there for you, I touch you to let you know that you're not scum, you're loved by me, your respected by me. The touch of a loved one is deeper than the touch of a co-worker, or someone who is not so intimate with you. The loved one's embrace speaks of years of experience together. Heaven forbid but if I murdered somebody, or something to that effect, my brother would embrace me. It would be instant. And the embrace would say it doesn't matter what you've done, I love you, you're a part of our family, you're ... you're necessary.

We're brought into this world alone yes but we spent 9 months in the midst of our mother. We're in the warmth of that and we come out and we're instantly touched, and affectionately loved. Instantly thrown into the arms of a loving mother, that touches and caresses you. I don't know where I heard it but if I'm not mistaken it's one of the reasons why humans like to have their bums touched; because their parents held their bums all the time when they were children. Touch is part of life. That's why God gave us hands. That's why God gave us senses in our body; it's a form of love, it's a form of connection.

Speaking can come from anywhere. It can come from anybody, it can come from a person you don't know. Whereas the touch and the communication of a hug, and a squeeze, is from someone who is closer to you. Someone who means more to you in life than just a stranger off the road. I mean it doesn't matter if you tell all the crazy things you've done in the world to the Pope, or Billy Graham or whoever. They may have great words of wisdom for you, but when a loved one gives you a significant hug of forgiveness that says I care for you, you're needed--that is a whole different ball game. You have communication there.

With the forgiving touch the one thing that comes to mind is grace. Such touch, in a sentence would mean... God's grace. God's mercy. Forgiveness. Hope.

The touch of forgiveness means a weight lifted off. The feeling of guilt is drained from you and you are given the chance to start over with a clean slate. There was a need for me to change... just to prove to her my love in that area. If I would have went out and continued to do the same things I would have totally annulled my asking for forgiveness. And we do that with God. I mean we ask forgiveness of Him, and awhile later we do the same sin again. And it's a slap in the face to God. Just as much as it would have been with Ashley. It would have been a slap in the face that said, you forgave me but now I'm going to betray your love, right again. We do that to God who is our best friend. Yet Ashley was face to face with me, I saw her every day. God is with me every day but I don't see him visually. He's with me, he's right next to me, but there's something about the visual. Ashley was there, the touch was there, the love... and I couldn't betray her love. I don't ever want to betray that.

My new positive action showed her my willingness to change. If my action isn't changed the love on her part is going to fall apart... it's going to feel hurt. The same actions cannot

continue in order for the same good love to happen, and touch... with betrayal the touch isn't going to be there. It's going to disappear. She's not going to want to be around me, she's not going to want to touch me if she doesn't feel that I'm loyal to her, that I love her. If I'm not going to change my actions and go forward, then there isn't loyalty to her, or respect. The betrayal is a disrespect for her. It's taking away my gift to her. My gift to her sexually would be taken away and the thought pattern in her head would be, he's been with somebody else, he's doing that on a regular basis, how can I touch this guy? How can I sleep with him? At least that's what I'd feel.

Take for example the incredible healing that has to take place when a spouse has been raped... the healing that has to take place between those two people in order to rectify. Even though it wasn't a sin of the two parties, it takes a huge amount of healing in order for there to be a great amount of sexual touch... I can't imagine what it would be like. But to always think in your mind how this person has been violated. It would be similar in Ashley's case if I had slept with somebody again and then we go to sleep together in our marriage. Ashley's heart would say, this guy's been with somebody else and that appalls me. Coming home today my hand was sore, and Ashley massaged my hand... just the loving way it was done. To violate a marriage through sleeping around--the touch changes because there is lack of respect. There is lack of love.

Ashley doesn't overly enjoy talking about it now but sometimes we have to. If I bring up that I'm going through a difficult time, or I failed through masturbation and there was pornography at work or whatever, she wants me to tell her. She wants to help me but I have to explain to her how she can help or explain to her that I'm dealing with a difficult time right now, let's do something about that. I need to tell her before the act happens not after.

My wife's loving, forgiving touch... I don't think she realizes how much that means. It speaks volumes. The instant reaction is such a powerful tool. It just means... instant love. And instant forgiveness. I remember hugging while we laid in bed. Without touch where are we in life. We always have verbal and verbal is so empty sometimes. Touch really reveals healing... it reveals the heart. It reveals what we are. I've experienced this throughout my life that touch can be harsh, touch can be discipline, touch can be love, touch can be forgiveness, touch can be everything.

When you don't get that touch, or that connection, I think there's a distance. There grows a distance between people. Touch brings us closer. I feel distanced from my wife when I don't touch her leg or hold hands. I feel that's a form of communication for us. Even if my hand is resting on the seat, but my knuckles are touching her leg, that to me is a form of connection, it's a form of me showing her that she's special. She's somebody that I love, and I wouldn't do that to another woman. That is the difference between me talking to one woman and me talking to my wife. I want to touch her, I want to love her, I want to show her through that means, even though there's a thousand other ways of showing love, that is one way of communication to my wife that is special between us. I mean a mother or a father shouldn't hug another girl the same way they do their own daughter. There should be a special connection there which shows love.

If there is no forgiveness you cannot touch in the same way. When something is unforgiven touch becomes awkward. For example if I come up behind my wife and tickle her, which I know bugs her, and then try to hug her and say oh I'm sorry, without really meaning it--there's an awkward hug there, like I do not want to hug you, stay away from me. She's stiff as a board, or there's no response. There's one person giving a hug, but there's no person giving it back. With the touch of forgiveness if you try to communicate when there's something unsettled it doesn't really work.

Forgiveness allows the growth to go on. It gives the freedom to go on, and I think the relationship grows stronger. I mean, every failure... I think great things can come from that. Depending on how a person responds to an instance it can make a relationship stronger or it can weaken it. Ashley's response, her touch, strengthened our relationship. Forgiveness can happen and the relationship can still go on. Ashley's response to me is how I perceive true forgiveness, the forgiveness of a strong woman who stood behind what she was saying and backed it up with physical action.

If I felt she was holding back, the growth process would have taken longer... we could still get to that point of growth, but it would take longer. You can give a person a hug and just tell right away if they want to withdraw. On the other hand if you're all of a sudden the person realizing, man we've been hugging a long time but yet the hug is still there. And it's strong. And it's not withdrawing in any way, then you know their touch is real and true. When there's a forgiveness, but there's still a hint of--I'm ticked at you for doing that but I forgive you--I think you would notice it instantly in the response of a hug. It would be a shorter hug, or colder, or not quite as warm of an embrace.

The way Ashley responded definitely opened me up. It opened up the opportunity to share my past failures, and to know that I could share my failures in the future. When things arise even now, it's still difficult. It's just human nature, it's still hard to talk about your failures, and your faults. It's not an easy thing to proclaim your own guilt because you're incriminating yourself. That's a hard thing to deal with but I think what's harder for me is the pain I put her through. If only I could think about that pain before I've failed. The people that you truly love... if we knew the pain that we're putting them through I don't think we'd fail nearly as much. I think we would fight it, and fight it. Or go to them and say, look I'm dealing with this right now... I'm harbouring these feelings and I don't want

to fail, can you help me with this. That would be the wiser thing to do, especially when your dealing with husband/wife issues of sexuality. To work together to where there's that freedom--but then there's always the case when there's miles between you and then you just have to fight it in your own head and work that through.

Her embrace made me desire to never fail her again. Because of the pain I put her through. Because of the pain I went through... that separation time. I think of the devastation something like that would be now that we're married. Now there's been years of intimacy and at that point there wasn't. We didn't have sex before marriage, so I think now that we've built that trust it would obviously be a lot more terrible.

Now the thought of ever going to a massage parlor or whatever it may be, suddenly brings back the memory of her pain and her embrace. It's probably the truest form of love that I can think of. It was a beautiful moment because we can be told that we're loved, and we can in many ways have love through touching and love in affectionate ways... but when a person has failed and there's an embrace, the embrace is multiplied in huge numbers just because of the acceptance. There's a peace--you're relieved, the burden is taken off of you.

Touch brings you close. Touch also proves that there's no separation. A letter is beautiful. Words can be beautiful... words of the most beautiful writers in the world can mean a lot, but it only means as much as the person receiving it understands. We understand touch better than words. Touch expresses feelings without words. True affection... true touch... speaks more than words can express because you don't have to say anything to express it. I mean you can be in the middle of a hectic day, you're rushing all over the place, and all of a sudden you think to yourself--man, I love my wife. And without saying a word you just reach over and touch her and grasp her hand, and look in

her eyes. Not a word is exchanged, but that moment, I mean it's almost like, don't say a word; you don't want to break that moment, you don't want to wreck it by saying something foolish, you want to embrace and enjoy the moment of touch because it speaks volumes of I love you. You could receive a letter, even hand to hand, but there always has to be a point of embrace to feel that forgiveness. To see if it's real.

Forgiveness is so important. I want to instill in my wife the freedom to fail. Because without that I don't believe there's meaning. I mean she might as well be a robot. I want her to feel, to live life not totally recklessly but I want her to enjoy life and to live it, not afraid that if she were to fail at something or hurt me that she has lost the world. You know I want her to feel that she can take risks, make decisions... on her own or with me or whatever in such a way that even if it's a wrong decision it doesn't matter, she'll still be loved by me. I mean if I take that right to not forgive in a certain case ... I've taken away her freedom. It's hugely selfish because in one act of forgiveness there can be peace and there can be communication and you know there's no break down of the growth of marriage.

Forgiveness led to deeper intimacy because I knew that she knew about my past. I knew I was forgiven, I knew there was an avenue for her to love me for who I was. I was afraid to fail, mainly because I didn't want to put her through that again. But I knew that if I ever did she wouldn't just say take off. That allowed us to grow deeper, allowed us to build a stronger relationship to the point where we could share anything. Because of her trust there came a point that I told her about my past involvement with prostitutes. I told her that I wasn't a virgin and that was a hard thing to tell. A person hates to tell their weaknesses. A person hates to have to admit that their wrong... but I think it's necessary and it's justice.

God has created the world in such a way that we react to our husbands and wives by admitting that we're wrong in certain areas and allowing ourselves to receive forgiveness. It's the same way with God, we admit that we're sinners, that we fail, and that's what allows us to have an eternal relationship. It allows us to have that freedom with Him to experience the forgiveness that He gives. To experience the grace. Without God I believe our world would be horrendous because we wouldn't experience grace, we wouldn't experience forgiveness. God giving us his own son, to die on the cross for us, that was the ultimate gift of forgiveness for our failures. He had the compassion to die on the cross for us so that we could have eternal life. Without that example, I question whether or not forgiveness would be evident in people's lives.

When I received Ashley's embrace I felt a lot more secure. I was relieved that there weren't any more secrets... that she knew me. The good, the bad, the ugly. You have to share those things because if you don't you will never grow in that relationship. Her embrace showed me she was truly the one I was to marry because of her character. She expressed the willingness to forgive, the willingness to say let's work together in this and let's move on. I mean there are many times that we talk about it, and there are still scary feelings, or scared thoughts of what could happen. But even in her fear she would never show it in such a way that would make me feel that I hadn't been forgiven on that day

When I touched her in that moment I was seeking acceptance... closeness. Forgiveness is confirmed by a touch. There's a longing in your heart, there's something that says without that touch you're missing the true gift of forgiveness. You're longing for it because without it, you just don't feel totally forgiven. It's like it has to happen to complete the gift. You're giving of yourself when you touch in forgiveness, and your giving away your selfishness. Ashley had every right to just say take a hike. She had been wronged. She had been mistreated by me, and I was disrespectful to her as a human being, and as a future

wife. She had every right to hold back that forgiveness, yet she gave it, so her gift was herself. She was giving of herself, and I think she was giving a piece of God.

Ashley gave of her character by saying I forgive you and saying I'm not going to withdraw myself from you, I'm giving myself and let's grow deeper in our friendship, our relationship. She gave me a second chance. She gave me a chance to breathe, she gave me life. She gave me the chance to heal, gave me the ability to take another step. By reaching out and embracing me she gave me herself.

Discussion

Peter felt immense shame over his sexual choices. He desired to refrain from sex of any kind before marriage but found himself caught up in pornography, masturbation, massage parlors and prostitutes. His shame reached its highest point when he was masturbated in a massage parlor despite the fact that he was engaged to be married. He decided to reveal his hidden life to his fiancé, Ashley. The forgiving touch he received from her was healing: the touch healed his shame; the touch healed his wounded sense of manhood; the touch healed the distance he had created between himself and Ashley.

Peter's shame had become a massive burden to him; recurring themes in his story were the forgiving touch as a lifter of this burden, and the touch's restoration of his confidence as a man and as a potential husband.

Organizational overview

In chapters one and two the personal and theoretical background of the research question was founded and an explanation was provided of how to research forgiving touch through the hermeneutic phenomenological method. In chapter three the detailed narratives of

participants and a preliminary discussion of thematic dimensions have been recorded. Chapters four through nine remain.

Chapter four looks at the foundation of the forgiving touch, the ground from which thematic dimensions of the experience emerged. Chapters five through eight provide an interpretation of these dimensions. Chapter nine concludes this study.

Chapter 4, Personal meaning: The foundation of the forgiving touch, provides a brief description of the elements that appeared foundational to participants' experience of the forgiving touch. This chapter provides a framework of understanding for the interpretive text that proceeds in chapters five through eight.

Chapter 5, Reawakening the Bond uses the stories of Joshua and Sarah to examine the nature of the forgiving touch as it relates to re-establishing the bond between father and son, and mother and daughter.

Chapter 6, Restoration of Character, utilizes John's story to investigate the forgiving touch as verification of a person's significance in a relationship, verification of the true character of the one who has been forgiven.

Chapter 7, Releasing the Pain of the Past, focuses on Joseph's story to explore how the forgiving touch serves to release the pain caused by another and open the door to continued personal and relational growth.

Chapter 8, Healing the Shame: The Return to Oneness, explores the stories of Miriam and Peter to examine the healing of a deep wound in the love relationship.

Chapter 9, Final Reflections, provides a closing discussion of the present research study. Clinical, theoretical, and research implications are presented. My personal experience of the hermeneutic phenomenological process is included and, finally, limitations of the study are briefly discussed.

CHAPTER 4

PERSONAL MEANING: THE FOUNDATION OF THE FORGIVING TOUCH

> When someone does us wrong, we feel as though they have taken away something that belonged to us--our peace, our joy, our happiness--and that they owe it to us. When we forgive them, we simply release them from their debt.
>
> (Stoop and Masteller, 1991, p. 162)

Introduction

Participants in this study spoke of their experience of the forgiving touch, yet the overwhelming content of each interview consisted of their interpretation of their experience. This may have been partly due to participants' verbal skills, to their spirituality, to their desire to establish and maintain intimate personal relationships, or to the questioning pattern of the interview. In any case, even in the presence of such factors, the stories of the participants in this study suggest that the forgiving touch is experienced as meaningful, and such meaning is revealed in the narration of each individual.[1]

We interpret physical and sexual abuse, each a violently negative form of touch, and it is in our interpretation that meaningful and therapeutic understandings can transform our lives. Such meaningful and therapeutic understandings also appear inseparable from the experience of the forgiving touch.

The word "touch" is performative, active, yet its range is vast. We say, something "touched" me, or I was "touched" by something, and it is the emotional touch we speak of. We know when this "touch" occurs; we recognize it. Sometimes this "touch" even coincides with a time when we are physically touched. In such cases we are touched emotionally as we are touched physically; a powerful and emotional meaning is attached to

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[1] Arguably, not only touch but every experience in the lived world of human existence is already given as meaningful. Such an understanding of experience is both truthful and acknowledged, but in this study the "meaning" I refer to is not the same as the basic meaning inherent to all experience. When we are touched on the arm in a crowded hallway, or brushed against in a line, the meaning we experience is neither therapeutic nor personally significant. The touch of forgiveness, however, was related by participants in this study to hold both therapeutic and personally significant meanings.

the physical contact and we may "feel" this meaning in an embrace, a kiss, a touch. Each one of us has been touched on the shoulder inadvertently, touched on the shoulder to get our attention, touched to be asked to move, or touched to signify any number of things; but when we are touched in forgiveness the emotional experience may be truly "touching." The experience of individuals in this study suggests that when we are touched emotionally it may signify the move from a cerebral understanding that physical touch has transpired to an understanding that we have been "touched" in the soul.

What is it then that makes a touch, a "touch"? In each participant's experience meaning associated with the physical forgiving touch was what set it apart emotionally. Whether the touch was given or received, meaning was enveloped in each person's experience of the touch. Two metaphors presented themselves to symbolize the experience: the forgiving touch was like the lifting of a burden, and like a restoration. For Joshua it was the lifting of the burden his son's poor attitude had brought to their relationship, and the restoration of the love relationship they had shared before. For John it was the lifting of the burden of appearing "bad", and the restoration of his character. For Sarah it was the lifting of the burden of hurt felt between her and her mother, and the restoration of the nurturing bond they had shared. For Joseph it was the lifting of the burden of many years of pain that rose from his mother's abandonment of him, and the restoration of his own sense of identity. For Peter it was the lifting of a burden of shame and the restoration of his confidence as a man and as a potential husband. For Miriam it was the lifting of the burden of hurt that had reopened her past wounds of rejection, and the restoration of oneness in her relationship with her husband. In each case a burden was lifted off and a restoration ensued; in each case their was emotional meaning latent in the physical touch.

The origin of words can often reveal an aspect of meaning that would otherwise remain hidden. The word 'give' lies within the word 'forgive'. Incredibly, the word 'give'

originally meant 'take' (Oxford, 1966). The significance of this original meaning may be most clear when we touch in forgiveness. In the forgiving touch it appears we take something away, we release a debt, we lift off a burden. For the participant's in this study the forgiving touch seemed to take away the burden a wound had brought to the love relationship. Participants suggested the touch took away their shame, it took away their hurt and their loss... it took away the threats unforgiveness had nourished. Yet not only was the original meaning of 'give' felt in the forgiving touch, but also the traditional or modern-day meaning. In giving and receiving the touch participant's not only took a burden away, they truly gave: they gave the opportunity to reawaken the former nature of the love relationship, they gave the opportunity for renewed internal and relational peace.

It would be limiting to say the only meanings tied to the forgiving touch are found in the lifting of a burden or in the experience of restoration. Interviews contained massive amounts of text filled primarily with participants' understandings of their experience. The lifting of a burden and the experience of restoration appeared foundational, but many other meanings were also present in the experiential structure of the forgiving touch. The chapters that follow attempt to illuminate such additional meanings, meanings that might be best understood as individual hues in a painting of forgiving touch whose primary colors are a burden released and a restoration experienced.

The structure of the forgiving touch

Lifting of burdens and experiencing restoration characterized the forgiving touch for participants but it was the structure of the experience that provided a mental framework to understand its process in human lives. In this study a structure, or sequence, reflecting the movement from relationship to distance to renewed relationship emerged. In each participant's experience there was first an established or wished-for connection (the love relationship). This connection was then injured, unquestionably altering the nature of the

connection. For an honest forgiveness to transpire, one or both people had to acknowledge the injury and its threats to the nature of their bond. Finally, touch was a part of the process that declared forgiveness had been chosen and acted upon. Stated simply, the process entailed the connection, the injury, the altering of connection, the acknowledgment of the injury's threats to connection, the choice to forgive, and a touch to seal forgiveness. Each of these elements were uniquely experienced by participants but some general thoughts can be stated to provide an initial understanding of the forgiving touch.

The connection, and the injury

What is it that creates within us the need for forgiveness? In what context does the forgiving touch become a reality? Such questions cannot be fully answered, but a look at the significant bonds of the six participants in this study provides an appropriate starting point for exploration. In each context of touch and forgiveness a love relationship existed; again, a relationship in which love was expected, desired or hoped for. This is not to say that love was accomplished or satisfied in every relationship, we need only look at Joseph's story to see a connection in which love was expected, desired, and hoped for but was never returned. Even so, the love relationship existed, and was therefore a place in which the forgiving touch could transpire.

Throughout each interview the love relationship represented an established or at least wished-for connection; this was the context in which forgiveness became necessary. Participants suggested that that which produced shame and guilt and required forgiveness in the love relationship may have required little or nothing in relation to a stranger or to someone from whom love was not desired, expected, or hoped for. The love relationship may be the place in which the concept of owing or being owned (the concept of indebtedness) is lived out. Participants spoke of the expectations involved in the love relationship, that which is in a sense "owed" in a loving bond. Their understanding of the

love relationship included an element of indebtedness--a respect, dignity, and honor--that when broken required mending. In such a context the shame and guilt that followed a wound for the offender, and the emotional bondage that rose up in the offended, appeared to create for participants a debt against the love relationship that only forgiveness could erase.

The altering of connection, and the acknowledgment of the injury's threats to connection

Participant's revealed again and again the complexity of the emotions that create a need for forgiveness. Often this emotional interplay was characterized by shame, by guilt, or by some combination of the two. Embarrassment is sometimes grouped with shame and guilt, but in this study embarrassment was never referred to directly by participants. Considering that embarrassment seems to accompany an impropriety, something that may be no fault of our own or purely accidental, its role in promoting the need for forgiveness may not be as primary as that of shame or guilt. Shame appeared to accompany both the recognition of and the exposure of fault. In the stories of John and Peter, shame was felt after they realized what they had done to jeopardize the love relationship. Shame produced in John and Peter a feeling of personal nakedness or inadequacy, a feeling that exposed the injury they had brought to the love relationship and heightened in them the need for forgiveness. Guilt most often seemed to be associated with indebtedness, with a normative or internalized belief or standard that participants felt they had broken or betrayed. Guilt, whether it was framed as a feeling of guilt or a guilty conscience, also exposed the injury and intensified the need for forgiveness.

> Guilt has to do with what we have done, and shame has to do with who we are. When we do something wrong and feel badly about it, that is guilt. When we conclude we are a terrible person because of what we've done, that is shame.
> (Stoop and Masteller, 1991, p. 172)

Influenced by shame and guilt, a person who has injured the love relationship sees clearly this injury and responds with a desire for the healing forgiveness promises[2]. If such shame or guilt are denied, then the injury may go unrecognized, forgiveness may not be sought, and connection may be irreparably damaged. In this study, the love relationship was a place in which the exposure of fault or the breaking of a relational standard was followed by shame and guilt and by the desire for forgiveness. An established or wished-for connection created an expectation of mutual dignity, of mutual relational respect. Injury altered the shared connection--it wounded mutual dignity, it wounded mutual respect. Participants felt that if the injury was not worked through, threats to connection such as distance, superficiality, and limited intimacy may have permanently diminished the love relationship.

For the offender, feelings such as shame, guilt, and the desire for renewed connection motivated the need for forgiveness. Conversely, it appeared to be the emotional burdens experienced in holding back forgiveness that moved people to eventually grant it. In Joseph and Miriam's stories for example, an injury was received (for Joseph, his mother's abandonment; for Miriam, her husband's emotional affair) and connection was undoubtedly threatened. In their stories forgiveness and the forgiving touch were decided on privately and acted on socially as a response to the burden of harboring unforgiveness and as an answer to the threats injury brought to the nature of the love relationship.

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[2] The question has been raised: Does forgiveness bring about healing, or does healing make possible forgiveness? A definition of the terms helps us to understand how this relationship was perceived in this study. To *heal* can be defined as to make whole or well, or to settle or reconcile (Random House, 1980). To *forgive* is to cease to blame or feel resentment about (an offense) or to cancel or let off (a debt). In this study, the relationship between healing and forgiveness appeared to be interactive. Participants indicated that ceasing to blame or feel resentment was often a part of the process of reconciliation. Yet they also reported that a strengthening of their own identity promoted the desire to reconcile. Forgiveness promoted healing, and healing promoted forgiveness. With this in mind, the two terms have not been vigorously separated in this study, they have been used somewhat interchangeably to suggest the interactive nature of healing and forgiveness.

The choice to forgive

> The process of forgiveness always begins with a decision. It is an act of the will, something we choose to do....
>
> (Stoop and Masteller, 1991, p. 167)

As the forgiving touch was given and received, participants in this study ascribed their own personal meaning to the experience. Such meaning, represented in each individual's interpretation of their experience, suggests intentionality. An injury threatened the nature of the love relationship. The injury and its threats were acknowledged and the emotional turmoil brought about by the injury had to be worked through. Finally, forgiveness was chosen. Those who forgave decided to forgive, and they marked this decision by touching the one who wounded them. Those who sought forgiveness decided to seek it, and marked their decision by touching and being touched by the one they had wounded.

A touch to seal forgiveness

Again, participants' experience suggests that when forgiveness and touch coincide we are "touched" emotionally. Touch was performative not just physically, but also emotionally. In the touch, participants who gave forgiveness were able to fully express their forgiveness; and those who received the forgiving touch, in its warmth or coldness, in its ease or rigidity, were able to distinguish beyond doubt whether or not they had been forgiven. In this true touch, a touch of the heart, participants spoke of transformation. Each individual, including Joseph, noted that a significant emotional change was verified in the physical experience. The nature of this touch in humanity may be reflected in the experience of the six individuals in this study. In the forgiving touch the threats posed by relational injury may be removed, and we may realize we have been freed to love again.

Conclusion

> ...there is the term *contact,* from *contigere*, which, according to Klein's Etymological dictionary, means "to touch closely," connectedness, being in-touch. The Latin preposition *con* often has the effect of augmenting the term to which it is attached. In other words *con-tact* carries the same meaning as tact but

> in enhanced, intensified form. It refers to a close human relationship, intimacy, connectedness.
>
> (van Manen, 1991, p. 127)

The forgiving touch is one way to re-establish *contact* with another person. The stories of the individuals in this study reflect that in the touch, physically and emotionally, there is no longer a distance between us and our loved one. Their experience suggests the forgiving touch can be something that performs meaning in our lives. The touch can take away even as it gives; it can take away the burden and distance of unforgiveness as it restores opportunity to connect again.

Making contact though it may be undeserved; being in touch with another person after a breach has distanced us; lifting off the burdens that have kept us from closeness; restoring our own sense of personal and relational peace--such understandings appeared to envelope the individual experience of forgiving touch in this study. Thus, making contact, truly "touching" another, lifting off burdens, and experiencing restoration are fundamental to the interpretation of forgiving touch that follows in chapters five through eight. I explore the structure and process of forgiving touch that underlies the experience of Joshua, Sarah, John, Joseph, Peter and Miriam. Chapter five looks at Joshua's and Sarah's stories to highlight the reawakening of a loving bond. Chapter six, by focusing on John's story, considers the restoration of character. Chapter seven investigates the lifting off of the burden of past pain found in Joseph's experience. Chapter eight, using Peter's story, focuses on the forgiving touch as a healing of shame, and considers Miriam's story to investigate the restoration of oneness. The entire exploration in chapters five through eight is revealed through each individual's experience of connection, injury, altered connection, acknowledgment of this altering, and the ensuing choice either to forgive or to seek forgiveness. Within this sequence or structure, dimensions of the forgiving touch are continually explored.

CHAPTER 5

REAWAKENING THE BOND

The need for forgiveness arises when someone has acted in such a way as to bring about a fundamental disruption to the wholeness or integrity of one's life. Initially, on a deep, almost organic level, there is a tearing of the fabric of one's life, one's world.
(Rowe et al., 1989, p. 239)

Forgiveness offers a chance at reconciliation; it is an opportunity for a life together instead of death together.
(Smedes, 1984, p. 169)

Introduction

In the parent/child relationship the opportunity to grow both physically and psychologically first presents itself. If the relationship is characterized by nurturance the child responds with growth; when nurturance is threatened, growth is threatened. Spitz (1965) confirmed the importance of a nurturing connection to the human infant, and the devastation a loss of connection brings. Joshua and Sarah had grown to cherish the parent/child relationship--Joshua with his son, Sarah with her mother--a relationship experienced as loving, accepting, and nurturing. In each case an injury came to threaten this loving connection and a crisis of forgiveness ensued in which the connection was altered and could not go on without resolution or reparation. Touch spoke of this reparation, and of the restoration of the former nature of the parent/child connection. For Joshua and Sarah touch was the restoration of love, acceptance, and nurturance.

Joshua's narrative demonstrated the desire of a father to reunite with his son. His son had distanced himself, and Joshua desired to close this distance. In Joshua's case, altered connection was experienced as a loss of unity, and he spoke of this loss to his son:

> Our unity is more important than the other factors. I feel that the coach/player relationship has undermined our unity, so I'm not going to coach your team anymore until we get this resolved. And if we can't get this resolved, then I will not coach. So you need to think about what we've said and when you're ready to talk, we'll talk, but as of now, I'm no longer your coach.

Joshua's unity with his son was 'undermined' and the problem that had so altered a loving, nurturing connection needed to be 'resolved'. Joshua felt his son's attitude was a threat to their connection, and he halted his coaching relationship with his son until the threat was resolved. In the end, Joshua's son asked forgiveness, Joshua chose to give it, and in the touch the connection became as it was before. Joshua's words revealed this renewal:

> If I was giving something, it was comfort, care, concern.
>
> With my son's touch, I told my wife it was one of the great moments of our relationship, of our life, because it opened the floodgates of a good, honest discussion about our coach/player relationship, why he wanted me to continue, what we needed to work on together. It expanded everything and the result then was a phenomenal year of coach/player relationship, and dad/son relationship.

As father, Joshua experienced the forgiving touch with his son. The burden of a relationship that was going nowhere was lifted; the relationship was free again to advance. Sarah was on the other side of the spectrum; as daughter, she experienced the forgiving touch with her mother. She too had an established and strong connection, but the context of how this connection was injured differed from Joshua's experience. Sarah's mother had delivered a hurtful comment. The injury altered their connection. Sarah acknowledged this altering, expressed her hurt over the situation and eventually chose to forgive her mother for the brash remark. Touch renewed their connection. Like Joshua, Sarah experienced the forgiving touch as nurturing and accepting:

> She held me as I cried. But it was the way she hugged me. It was very much... it was very much an embrace that I had grown to rely on and trust and love. I felt very included. There's always a hand on your head. It was more of a cradling. It was more a presence... that she was truly there, not to judge or to fix but to allow for acceptance.

Joshua and Sarah's stories reflect the restoration of connection. In the touch, Joshua and Sarah felt not only the giving and receiving of forgiveness, but the renewal of the nurturance so integral to their parent/child bond. Joshua's role as parent was threatened on some level by the breach that had developed between he and his son. Sarah's role as a child was threatened by the breach between her and her mother. In each case, touch conveyed meaning, touch meant forgiveness; but along with forgiveness, touch meant

restoration. In this chapter, forgiving touch as a reawakening of the previous nature of the love relationship is explored.

Reawakening the former nature of the love relationship

To reawaken is to imply that what has been reawakened was once awake, but has somehow fallen asleep or been hidden from realization. In this research we find ordinary words carry specific meaning. The word reawaken has certain obvious implications; it has literal and metaphorical meaning as well as Biblical and spiritual associations. The sense in which I use the word is metaphorical. Metaphor means life is like something else. The forgiving touch in love relationships is like a reawakening of our bond. I use the word metaphorically for practical reasons: to gather further insights, to obtain greater feeling and perspective, and to reveal some of the specific elements involved in the forgiving touch.

To *awaken* is to rouse from sleep or to come to full realization of (Webster,1990). Thus, to *reawaken* is to rouse from sleep once more, or to realize again what has been hidden. When we awaken within ourselves a sense of confidence we rouse something that has previously only been asleep. When we *reawaken* a sense of confidence, we rouse that which once was fully awake within us but had somehow gone to sleep again.

The touch of forgiveness in love relationships serves as a reawakening. That which was once fully awake has fallen asleep due to an injury received in the love relationship. That which was once fully realized is now hidden or out of reach. For Joshua and Sarah, the touch brought back to full realization the value, the closeness of their bond. Biblically, death is often captured metaphorically in the term sleep; those who have died in this world are often referred to as those who have fallen asleep. When a breach is caused, the former nature of the love relationship not only falls asleep, it can feel as if it has died. This feeling that the former nature of the love relationship has died is personally experienced as a deep

and continual wound. Both Joshua and Sarah recalled the former nature, the love, the closeness they once knew, and they realized the love was suppressed and the closeness had become distance. It was as if the former connection had died and whenever they considered this death they felt again the sting of their emotional wound. Joseph related the drastic altering an injury brings to connection; that which was loving, accepting, and nurturing, had become marked by pain:

> When resentment is going on I think it dehumanizes, destroys, it's destructive. You are feeding on each other's weaknesses and there are smirks... and shrugs, and look aways... and sarcasm. There is no intimate touch. When there's lack of forgiveness touch feels dishonest. Offensive. There may be a harsh touch. For some it could be physical abuse. But there's no intimacy of touch. There's no softness of touch. ...you don't feel worthy because you don't think they trust you in the relationship. Unforgiveness basically is saying I don't believe that you can change, or I don't believe that you want to change, or I don't believe that you care about me.

Sarah, too, related how love, acceptance, and nurturance, had become impossible to realize in the current state of her love relationship; things had to be resolved for this to occur. To relate as if the nature of the love relationship has not been altered by the injury becomes a repulsive thing:

> If there is emotional hurt happening, there isn't going to be a dishonoring of myself to say there's nothing wrong. When a loved one tries to touch while denying the distance between us I find myself more closed, I don't find myself open.

It appears if the wound is deep, we cannot deny it; for this would be a lie to the self and to our bond. Joshua and Sarah's stories suggest that forgiveness after a serious injury to connection is found in the acknowledgment that the injury occurred, and that the value of the relationship calls for a resolution or healing of the injury. During the time between the injury and the choice to forgive, the former nature of the love relationship was out of reach, it truly could not be "realized", it could be said to be asleep or dead. There was no assurance of the future, there was no surety in the bond. Previously the loving connection was established beyond a shadow of a doubt, but injury had now cast its shadow on the connection. What is it like then to be in the shadow of doubt, when forgiveness is needed but has not yet come? The question becomes, What is the nature of the love relationship

during unforgiveness? What parts of it have gone to sleep? What cannot be realized until resolution occurs?

In the shadow of doubt: The nature of the love relationship during unforgiveness

Before the injury there was the acceptance and nurturance of the love relationship: for Joshua the father/son relationship he had developed, and for Sarah, the mother/daughter relationship. Then the injury came and altered that acceptance, that nurturance. Sarah commented on how her mother emotionally injured her:

> Her sharp comment said she wasn't available and that I couldn't share this with her. I wanted her to know me, I didn't want her judgment or rejection. I wanted her to listen and accept me so I was quite surprised when she made this sweeping generalization that I couldn't be happy.
>
> There was a separateness.

The injury came into Sarah's love relationship and significantly changed its emotional and physical nature; she was in the shadow of doubt and the forgiveness that would reunite her and her mother had not yet come. Sarah related how touch takes on new character in this emotional limbo:

> It is difficult for us to touch when we really need resolution of our hurt. I think that makes us feel vulnerable. Physical contact speaks of intimacy and when there are issues in the relationship, it's harder to connect, it's harder to say I want to be close, I want you that close in my world. Part of it is a protection to say, no, I'm not prepared to allow you to be that close to me. I can't betray the fact that I'm hurt and I don't want you that close.

Joshua also spoke of how it is difficult for the body to deny the wound and touch with the same intimacy as before. When the love relationship is free of bitterness, free of the burdens a wound can bring--then we neither doubt our bond nor question its future. We touch in welcome, in play, in meaningful moments, to get our loved one's attention, to say good-bye... we touch for any number of reasons and there is a freedom and an uncluttered simplicity in the touch. We do not doubt the quality of our bond, and in our touching we feel nothing that would declare our bond has been threatened. But when our loved one wounds us the shadow of doubt passes over our connection and the nature of our bond as

well as our touch changes. The hesitancy and even anger we now experience in touching says we no longer know beyond a shadow of a doubt that the quality of our relationship exists as it was before. We are in doubt's shadow and touch cannot go on without uncertainty and awkwardness. Joshua's experience and his interpretation of it reveals what touch can be like when the love relationship is in the shadow of doubt:

> Your whole body is tense when there is unforgiveness. ...we often want emotional and physical separation because tender touch and kindness and softness are expressions of the heart. You have to be an incredible liar to be really tender during unforgiveness, or out of touch with what is going on. There is incongruence there; to have tremendous anger or bitterness or conflict with someone and yet touch them tenderly.

For Joshua and Sarah the future of the love relationship became an unknown; what was formerly experienced as growth, motion, and dynamic connection, had become halted, motionless, and stagnant. Joshua's words reflect how our perception of the future is often affected during unforgiveness:

> When there is no forgiveness you could say the relationship either stands still, or it reverses. There are times when the problem gets worse and worse... and that's why you have to have some commitment to forgiveness or eventually the unforgiveness overcomes you, you just can't find forgiveness in your heart.

When the love relationship is wounded (in this case by the attitude of Joshua's son, or the biting remark of Sarah's mother) the former nature of the relationship is physically and emotionally out of reach. What once was a place in which Joshua and Sarah were cherished, loved, valued, and seen as worthy had become a place of doubt, mistrust, devaluation, and bitterness: the connection was altered. It appears only resolution can reawaken the former nature of the connection; if we deny the existence of the wound, we deepen the sleep of its former nature, we further distance the opportunity for that nature to be realized once again. Both Joshua and Sarah stated that when we are touched while the wound remains we find the touch repulsive and when we are spoken to in intimacy before resolution we shy away and speak only of the menial, the trivial. Again, if the wound is deep it appears we cannot deny it, for this seems to block the honesty needed to advance

toward forgiveness. For Joshua and Sarah the altered nature of the connection, a nature of doubt and distrust, had become a barrier to the former nature. Sarah spoke of this barrier:

> There was a wall that said I don't want to risk. I don't want to risk hurt, I don't want to risk that you would not see me in a positive light, I don't want to risk having to say I'm sorry.
>
> We say someone is out of touch because maybe they can't be reached. ...there isn't that connection.

Joshua and Sarah each used the term "out of touch" when speaking of unforgiveness. One meaning of these words is revealed in the physical and emotional distance associated with unforgiveness. When there has not been resolution of something hurtful we are truly out of touch; we do not allow ourselves, emotionally or physically, to be touched on an intimate level by our loved one. We close ourselves off from them within and without. Joshua stated:

> ...there's hurt feelings ...there's tension. When you're mad and bitter, and there's unforgiveness, you not only want emotional separation you also want physical separation. The question is do you want to be right, or do you want to be forgiven. Do you want a relationship or do you want brokenness. And if you want to be right more than you want the relationship then you can lay there in your anger.

For Joshua and Sarah injury altered connection. Emotionality moved from love and acceptance to mistrust and anger. Communication retreated from intimacy to triviality. Physical touch became an avoidance of the softness and intimate expression that used to flow freely in the relationship. In such cases every new touch, every new attempt at intimacy becomes a painful reminder of the need for resolution, and increases our bitterness. The former nature of the relationship cannot be realized or "felt"; again, it can be said to be asleep, or dead. It is this state of sleep or death that seems to threaten the core of the love relationship. Both Joshua and Sarah interpreted unforgiveness as just such a threat. Their words reflect the thought that if we allow the relationship to remain asleep, to remain dead, then we risk that it may sleep forever; we risk the loss of the entire love relationship. Rather than risk this loss Joshua and Sarah acknowledged the injury and its threats to connection, and this led them toward forgiveness and touch.

The point of reawakening

To experience again the love we once knew--to come back from such sleep-- we must be reawakened. The word awake descends from the Old English word *wake* meaning 'not sleep'; and wake was derived from the Indo-European base *wog-* or *weg-* meaning 'be active or lively'. From this base the word wake formed the foundation for such words as growth, staying awake, and watching or guarding (Ayto, 1990). In unforgiveness the loving nature of our bond can be said to be asleep. But such sleep is not a light sleep from which a subtle nudge or quiet noise may reawaken us. It appears nothing but resolution can make the loving nature of our bond 'active' or lively' again; only the healing of our injury can reawaken it; and only touch can give us immediate verification of our healing.

The love relationship can be fragile. After an injury growth can seem impossible, the future of the relationship may come to a standstill, and closeness may be dangerously elusive. Thus it becomes necessary to keep the loving nature of our bond awake, to guard this nature lest it fall into a sleep from which it might not be reawakened. Yet despite our efforts to maintain love the stories of participant's in this study reveal we sometimes terribly wound a loved one. In such cases bitterness rises up and the loving nature of the bond becomes inactive, it falls asleep. For some, such as Joseph, Sarah and John, the loving nature of their respective relationships was asleep or in doubt for only moments or a mere few hours. For others, such as Peter, Miriam and Joseph, the doubt, inactivity, and sleep of the love relationship was for days and weeks, and even years. It is in these times, when unforgiveness has put our bond to sleep, that we forgive in order to reawaken it. Touch is the moment in which this enlivening becomes reality. Resolution reawakens the

former nature of the relationship; the forgiving touch is the first, most powerful declaration of this reawakening.[1]

In the forgiving touch we revitalize our former love relationship; in the forgiving embrace we "feel" it again. If the former nature was love and acceptance, once again we feel loved and accepted. Yet before this reawakening can occur, a realization of the need for forgiveness and an openness to forgiveness must come into existence. Forgiveness did not come to participants in this study until its need was acknowledged and given opportunity to develop. Joshua related the moment of openness that came to him before resolution:

> (My son) came into the room and he asked forgiveness. But the first thing he did that showed this had really impacted him was that his sour attitude--it was all gone. There was a whole new spirit of, okay, I'm now ready to listen, I'm now ready to look in the mirror and see what's wrong with me, and Dad, I really want to open the lines of communication. ...I just opened to him, gave him opportunity. That's when he demonstrated tears and a repentant attitude to the point of wanting to touch, wanting some physical reassurance.

Sarah also related that forgiveness entails an emotional opening, an initial moment when trust again begins to build; this emotional openness lends opportunity to forgiveness, and to forgiving touch.

> (My mother) said to me, "... I really think I was just trying to help you move past it because it was so painful to see you there hurting."
>
> I felt there was a connection right then, there was an opportunity to talk about the hurt. I think connection between two people who love one another means love. There is mutuality, there is respect, there is an honoring of that person.

As shown in chapter seven, when Joseph's story is examined, it appears the forgiving touch can occur whether the offending person recognizes it or not; but even in such a case, the person who has chosen to give the forgiving touch despite the offender's denial has also chosen beforehand to be emotionally open to giving such a touch. In our openness we may be granting grace to our loved one. They have hurt us, this is undeniable, but we

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[1] In Joseph's case touch represented not so much the reawakening of the love relationship, but the opportunity for this reawakening. His mother never acknowledged the wound she had delivered. Thus, in her denial of a wound for which she needed forgiveness, a reawakening could not occur. This is further illuminated later in this chapter and especially in chapter seven when Joseph's story is explored.

choose not to hold this against them for if we hold the hurt against them it will stand between us as a barrier to our closeness. Joshua and Sarah valued closeness more than their need for revenge or retribution. Traditionally, when grace is granted, it means we give up the need for the revenge or retribution that is rightfully ours. When our loved one wounds us a distance comes to the love relationship. Their wound deserves a recompense, a hurtful retribution; a part of us may desire to cause them pain. Yet when we give grace we replace that pain with pleasure. So it was with Joseph and Sarah, and so it appears to be in humanity. It is not surprising then that the etymological roots of the word grace are found in the Latin *gratia*, meaning 'pleasure, favour, thanks'. The person who wounded us may deserve only pain, dishonor, and bitterness. When we grant them our grace we replace pain with pleasure, dishonor with favour, and bitterness with thanksgiving.

The decision of Joshua and Sarah to grant grace to the one who wounded them opened the opportunity for the restoration of the love relationship. The decision of Joshua's son and Sarah's mother to admit fault also opened the door to restoration. Once such initial openness by both parties paved the way for forgiveness the transformation of the relationship from bitterness and rejection to love and acceptance was verified or felt as real in the forgiving touch. In the touch Joshua and Sarah knew for certain that forgiveness had occurred. If their loved one would have held back, or touched harshly, or grown limp or unnatural in the touch--then it is likely they would have questioned the authenticity of the moment. If we perceive the touch is false, it appears we question whether forgiveness has occurred. But if the touch is true, if it carries in itself the forgiveness we have intended, then it acts as a potent physical actualization of what we have emotionally desired. For Joshua and Sarah, love, acceptance, and nurturance returned to their connection, and the bitterness and rejection they so recently experienced were no longer present. Touch authenticated forgiveness; in a moment it restored the former nature of the connection as it removed the dark nature that had taken it's place. Joshua and Sarah's stories reflect that we

verbally express our forgiveness; but physically, in the forgiving touch, we give each other opportunity to read the heart and see if what we have said is actually true. Their stories suggest that touch may reveal the truth of what has passed between us--forgiveness or continued bitterness.

For Joshua and Sarah touch represented an emotional bridge; it was a coming together, an overcoming of separateness, a closing of the distance. When we embrace there is nothing between us physically. For a moment we are as one, and that moment represents the nature of the love relationship; though we were separate, we are now together again, and though we had resented each other we have now released our resentment and chosen again to nurture each other, our relationship, and in the end ourselves.

Touch can bring us back to the peace of loving and being loved. Joshua spoke of the lifting of the burden of unforgiveness, and the return of the loving and nurturing that was once common to the bond between him and his son:

> He had his head on my chest. I put my arm around him. I gave him verbal assurance that he's special and he's important, that he is loved. ... I could have laughed it off, or I could have squeezed him extra hard or I could have tried to smother him in my arms... but the moment was so important, not to be wasted, or ruined. The manner in which I handled that touch was crucial.
>
> When there is full forgiveness and full touch, it's like starting all over, brand new. ...it's like a fresh, new day. It's optimism, encouragement, hope, freedom.

The forgiving touch is physical, but Joseph revealed that the memory of it may be more on the heart level than on its tactile nature.

> When we touch in forgiveness, I think we forget the physical feeling. When my son put his head on my chest, I have no recollection of what that felt like. I have a recollection of what I felt in the feeling part of my being. I remember how I felt about that touch.

Sarah, too, spoke of the how the heart remembers the moment touch secured. For her the moment was the return to love, the reawakening of the shared bond:

> The tears came in the touch and some of it for me was that she was available again. In the touch there is a connection saying this person is a kindred spirit. There is a relationship there. I don't necessarily remember the particulars of the touch as much as I remember the relationship.
>
> In the touch there was a renewal of the relationship, an affirmation of my character. With the embrace what my mom was saying is, I want closeness between us; I am very concerned and I don't want to do anything to harm you.

In forgiveness Joshua and Sarah came to the realization that they valued relationship over distance. Touch was a coming together to declare the value of closeness. They acknowledged a few things: first, that the hurt or the breach existed; second, that their respective relationships were distanced by whatever caused the breach; third, that they decided to put the wound behind them. Formerly the wound and all its emotion was directly before Joshua and Sarah. The wound kept them from truly touching their loved one on an emotional or heart level. The emotion of the wound--the anger, the hurt, the bitterness--was an insurmountable obstacle between them and their loved one. In forgiveness they put that obstacle behind them, they released the wound and opened themselves to be touched again emotionally. It appears the forgiving touch reveals the truth that we have released the wound, we have put it behind us, and that we can touch each other again in a loving manner. This is not a forgetting of the wound, but rather a remembering, an acknowledgment of its existence, but more importantly a desire to heal and to return to the loving nature of our initial connection. Touch may be a symbol of how important our connection is. Sarah captured this thought in her words:

> I think we touched physically, but we also touched on a relationship level. There's an acknowledgment of the value of the relationship. I think that's part of it's touching, at that point in time. ... it is an indirect manner of saying this relationship is important to me and it's not something that this kind of difference will separate. We won't allow this to destroy our relationship.

As Sarah remembered and acknowledged the value of the relationship in the touch, she also remembered and acknowledged its former nature. She "felt" its former nature once again. She gave away the resentment, and the way cleared for her to again meet her mother. If she had tried to touch before resolution, before forgiveness, then she would only have felt

resentment. But when forgiveness repaired the breach and healed the wound, she touched, and she felt again the loving nature of the bond.

> I remember the touch because my mom is the first person who I could allow to touch me. And so there is very much a comfort in it, such a kindness, and there is such a grounding that happens with that touch and there is such a sense of being cherished and loved.
>
> Our embrace said we can achieve the same foundation, there may be a shift or a change in it, but it is renewed and remains strong. The foundation may change shape but the essence of it is still the same. ...When we say the relationship came back together, that's the connection. It is symbolic of what actually happened: there is a lack of space between two people.

Touch brought Joshua and his son back to the emotional and physical closeness they once experienced. Touch erased distance and in the embrace Joshua and his son knew again their love was strong. The shadow of doubt experienced in a connection altered by injury was dispelled in the light of the forgiving touch:

> The touch and the forgiveness give certain things to the relationship... honesty... trust... oneness of heart and mind. And when you trust you are saying... I believe. When you ask forgiveness you are saying... I want you to care about me as a person.
>
> When you have anger and bitterness and you have let that build, then you have a period of destruction going on between two human beings. And that destroys you. Or at least you're being made to feel you're being destroyed. So there's a wound. And some wounds are quite severe. I'd go so far as to say it's almost necessary to have some form of touch.
>
> Touch in forgiveness closes the gap between two people. It takes away that distance. Touch... bonds together. It's a moment in time when you have an experience with that person that no one else in the world has.
>
> The touch is almost a receipt, that I really meant what I said. It gives credibility to the verbal offer. ...It's affirming them as a person in terms of--I am special, I am unique, I am cared for, I am loved.

For Joshua and Sarah the forgiving touch was that moment when they knew unquestionably that the love relationship had reawakened. The closeness they once felt had now returned and they could not deny it for the touch was too convincing. For Sarah touch told the truth of the reawakening shared with her mother:

> When we celebrate things, when we grieve things, touch is part of making that more real, more true to what it is that is happening. There is a love and intimacy that makes touch significant. We need touch from our loved ones.

> I think it was the depth of her embrace that resolved the hurt. There was a real sincerity in the way she touched me. It wasn't a distancing touch, it was a connecting touch. I felt she really cared.
>
> Words fail at times to communicate the power of our emotions. Touch is one way we can say something in a much more meaningful way than with words. When we touch in forgiveness ... we are making a comment about love and connection. There is something very nurturing and very comforting about touch. And I believe that's part of what we're doing, we're nurturing... nurturing our souls when we touch.

Conclusion

The parent/child connection was threatened by injury. Joshua in the father/son bond and Sarah in the mother/daughter bond experienced a crisis of forgiveness: the injury demanded healing before the love relationship could move on. As the most basic of human bonds a wound to the parent/child relationship created emotion that was uniquely powerful and destructive. The potential, the opportunity represented in this bond was threatened. For Joshua and Sarah, threats such as doubt, lack of trust, and avoidance of intimacy rose from the injury. Joshua and Sarah's interpretations of their experience suggest that if such threats are not resolved, the damage to the love relationship can become irreparable. The father/son bond, and the mother/daughter bond represent the birthing ground of self-esteem, confidence in the world, and faith in the stability of love relationships. When a deep wound comes to this relationship our self-esteem may be challenged, our confidence in approaching the world can crumble, and our faith in the stability of love relationships may waiver. Doubt may fill our perception of life and of love. Under such fears we often want immediate forgiveness to alleviate the strain of unforgiveness. But it appears our sense of personal dignity will not allow immediate forgiveness. An acknowledgment of the injury and its threats, an understanding of how to prevent a similar injury in the future, and a desire to renew love and care for the other person may be required before the forgiving touch can close the distance between loved ones and reawaken the former nature of their connection.

Inherent to the experience of both Joshua and Sarah was a will to keep the wound from destroying the love relationship. This produced a struggle, a crisis, in which forgiveness was required if resolution was to occur. Certainly the course of forgiveness--the working out of painful emotions, the breaking of silences, the talking through of hurts--may take time, but when forgiveness comes Joshua and Sarah's stories suggest it brings with it a reawakening. Touch may be our first affirmation of the restoration forgiveness represents.

Joshua gave us an example of the forgiving touch between father and son. Sarah provided an account of touch and forgiveness between mother and daughter. Touch is most often an outer and physical expression of self, but in forgiveness it appears to be an inner and emotional measure of the heart of the love relationship. The essence of the forgiving touch is the overcoming of that which has threatened the life of our connection. To Joshua and Sarah the forgiving touch lifted the burden of hurt, distrust, and resentment; it reawakened love, acceptance, and nurturance. The nature of the love relationship may be characterized by deep friendship, by loyalty and support, by emotional mutuality, by spiritual belief... or by any form of understanding or connection. Joshua and Sarah's experience and their interpretation suggest that whatever the former nature of the love relationship, it is reawakened in the forgiving touch.

CHAPTER 6

RESTORATION OF CHARACTER

I will get up and go to my father, and will say to him, "Father, I have sinne
heaven, and in your sight; I am no longer worthy to be called your son..."
And he got up and came to his father. But while he was still a long way off, his f
him, and felt compassion for him, and ran and embraced him, and kissed him.
(Luke 15: 18-20, NASB, The Lockman Foundation, 1977

...for no one can forgive himself and no one can feel bound by a promise mad
himself; forgiving and promising enacted in solitude or isolation remain without r
can signify no more than a role played before one's self.
(Arendt, 1958, p. 23

Introduction

A primary component of human development is the search for identity. Identi
defined as a robust sense of self (Bruno, 1992).

> The formation of an identity gives the individual a sense of continuity in li
> There is the impression, correct or incorrect, that one is the same person th
> was years ago. Also, one will be the same person in the future. Thus the
> with an identity feels strongly linked to both the past and the future.
> (Bruno, 1992, p. 16

Our identity is shaped in our love relationships, for here we first realize the pow
connection to others. With a sense of self we learn to accept our individuality
identity as our own. Yet we can never truly free ourselves from the human co
We cherish a strong sense of self, yet we place great value on our loved ones; w
be good in their eyes, we want to be treasured.

Even in intimacy emotional wounds occur and forgiveness becomes necessary for
to continue. We want to be valued in our love relationships, we want to b
important, as significant, but at times we injure our loved ones, we strike a brea
wall that is our love. Within this wound, buried in the breach's destruction, our
decays. If the love relationship is significant we hope for resolution. Yet as we
struggle in the worry and doubt of a damaged identity; we see our character as

what it used to be, and we see our loved one's perception of us as darkened and diminished.

When we experience forgiveness we sense that our character has been restored. We are seen again in the light of the love relationship, for its nature has been reawakened and our loved one's perception of us is once more a perception of trust. In forgiveness we understand that we have been welcomed again to the love relationship, we understand forgiveness represents the restoration of our character; yet even in our understanding we yearn for a deeper knowledge. We long to test the truth of the forgiveness that has passed between us and we do so by touching one another, for in the touch the truth of our hearts is very difficult to conceal. We know if we touch we will discover the truth of our loved one's perception of us. If our character remains tainted in their eyes, then this will be revealed in the touch. But if their forgiveness is true, and they welcome us again to their connection, then truly we "feel" restored. Unforgiveness separates us and in such separation our view of self and our view of how others perceive us grows dark. The forgiving touch verifies the restoration of our character.

The fall of our character

John's story illustrates the questioning of character that exists during unforgiveness. Just as in the experience of other individuals in this study the metaphors of a burden being lifted off, of a restoration taking place, and of living in the shadow of doubt are embedded in John's story. John's experience and his interpretation expressed the burden of feeling he was of low character. When John received the forgiving touch he felt this burden lifted.

John had an established and loving connection with his father. He then injured this connection and one of the threats that rose from this was John's perception that now his

character was tainted. After he wounded the father/son bond John doubted himself and his position in the bond. A meaning latent in the touch was for John the knowledge beyond a shadow of a doubt that his character and position in the love relationship had been restored.

When John wounded his father, when he injured the love relationship, he found it difficult to own a positive perception of himself. John spoke of the wound he delivered and his interpretation of the effects of the wound:

> I think you're whole tendency as a human being is that you want to be loved and accepted, first by your parents, then by others. You want them to respect you and to think highly of you. And when you do something stupid... all that just gets shattered. And you just become this stupid person in their eyes and in your eyes.
>
> I knew I'd have to face (my father) ...I remember feeling he really wouldn't want to be around me, feeling that he didn't like me, that he thought I was awkward, and stupid. So in terms of your own character you see yourself in a very negative light. You feel stupid, you feel ashamed, you feel dumb... and you see that person as holding that image of you.

In the love relationship it is our significance that creates a crisis in which forgiveness becomes important. The relationship is meaningful to us and we are considered a significant part of it; we are valued, we have worth in the eyes of our loved one. If John had accidentally destroyed a stranger's property, forgiveness would not have been necessary. He may have felt extremely anxious, but a simple apology and fair recompense would have sufficed for resolution. This suggests the level of our significance is related to how important forgiveness is in a given relationship. John valued his father's perception and so he desired forgiveness for the wound he caused; he felt his significance in his father's eyes had diminished and he feared that without forgiveness he might never be significant to his father again. John's connection with his father had been altered from trust to doubt, from joy to fear, and from a position of value to one of insignificance. John acknowledged these changes and chose to seek forgiveness. When forgiveness came he was brought back to a meaningful place in the heart of his father. He felt cherished again; in the touch he "felt" significant.

The origins of the word significance are found in the Latin *signum* meaning 'mark denoting something' (Ayto, 1990). Our significance in the love relationship may thus be said to be a mark denoting something--an element of the relationship marked by rich and specific meaning. From the experience of participants in this study it appears our significance in the love relationship may denote either the continued life of our bond, or the approach of its death. If we perceive we are significant to a loved one, our significance denotes the growth and beauty of the love relationship. But when we've wounded a loved one and we perceive our significance to them is decreased, such tainted significance strikes fear in us for it may denote the approaching death of our bond.

When we have wounded our loved one and the wound has distanced us our position in the love relationship is in the shadow of doubt, we question whether we are still significant in our loved one's eyes. John spoke of this questioning:

> I made a mistake, I did something bad to affect the relationship. It was my fault. When there is no forgiveness I think you wonder about certain things. You do not know in your heart if this person really cares about you. I think that buried in the heart of every person is the need for acceptance and belonging and to know that you are someone special in the heart of another person. And when there's no forgiveness... I believe those things are now in jeopardy. You suddenly do not know whether there was anything between you at all... whether you yourself to that person had now become a nobody, someone who does not exist to that person. ...you move from being this significant person to someone whose just a nobody.
>
> When there's no forgiveness you're no longer special to that person. And especially in your family, a place where you just feel this natural tie, you want to be significant. When there's no forgiveness it is all in jeopardy and you're no longer significant. You're no longer their very special son. So when there's no closure I think you're in a situation where you see yourself as not accepted by other people, and that you're not special, and that you're nobody. It's not that that's the truth, or that's reality, but that's what you perceive. You really believe in your heart if this person doesn't care for me, or if they don't want anything to do with me... then I must not be significant to them or anybody else.

In the loss of significance that John perceived in unforgiveness, he felt his character had crumbled. Formerly he was trusted, respected, and admired, but in that time of limbo when forgiveness tarried he questioned his value in his own eyes and in the eyes of his father.

It appears when we realize the hurt and possible destruction our wound has brought to the bond we begin to question and we struggle to regain a strong sense of our own character. We perceive our action as demeaning, our character as low. We have become a person with shifty eyes, a person to be distrusted. We ask ourselves, How could I have wounded our bond? How could I have created such distance between us? We see our character as full of fault, and we believe our loved one's image of us is the same. John related this inner struggle for a realistic sense of character:

> Before the forgiveness took place I thought I was in jeopardy of being put in a foster home. I thought (my father) would disown me. I mean in your own childish way you think that. You think, Dad doesn't want me when I break his front windshield. That's childish but I remember thinking it at that time. But even looking at it now, if that situation were to happen today there would still be that feeling... like the person would disown you. He doesn't want anything to do with you and it puts the whole friendship, the whole relationship in jeopardy. I remember feeling, what if my dad walked out on me, or kicked me out of the house. I was worried I would never have the closeness with him again.

John's words suggest that when we perceive our character is seen as distrustful or insignificant we feel the threat of rejection more acutely. We have wounded our loved one and the possibility of rejection nears reality. Though love, respect, and dignity were expected of us, instead we gave a wound. Our loved one has a right to reject us, we reason, for we have injured the relationship, we have created the distance and caused the hurt. It is here in the tension of unforgiveness that touch becomes not only limited, but offensive. Like Joshua and Sarah, John spoke of the dishonor of such a touch:

> When a loved one has wronged you and then tries to touch you before there has been a resolution you feel repulsed by the person. Just get away from me, don't touch me. It's a mockery of what's not there, a mockery of the intimacy that is no longer present. There's a barrier there... I mean it's like walking up to a stranger and kissing them--it's just not appropriate. You feel betrayed that there are things that are wrong and you subconsciously know they're wrong and here we are pretending it's right, pretending things are back to normal. There's no reality in that. It's just like kissing a stranger, there's not a relationship there but you're acting in a way that says you're intimate with this person.. it just doesn't make sense.

John's action created emotional and physical distance. Touch became inflamed; the normal day to day touching to get Father's attention, or just to hold his hand, or to move by him in

the kitchen could not happen now without tension. Loving touch, or touch that is positively meaningful and not only touches physically, but touches the heart--this form of touch was simply out of reach while John yet remained unforgiven. Thus the forgiving touch gains significance for it can be our first affirmation that we are truly "touched" again, that we are back in-touch with our loved one. This suggests the hurt we cause, whether it is verbal, physical, psychological, or sexual, can bring about a deep and lasting wound to the loving bond for it can change the experience of touch forever; the former context in which loving touch was a possibility may become unreachable. Small slights or hurts are often overlooked or forgotten, but some hurts cannot be denied and if no forgiveness follows then the love relationship is deeply bruised.

The life experience of people in this study implies that recovery from deep wounds requires extensive healing that will not occur if an injury is ignored or wished away. The nature of our connections can be radically altered by the harm we perpetrate. As a result the loved one we hurt has a right to reject us, and may in fact do so. Thus healing becomes necessary for without healing, the possibility of rejection is more and more believable:

> ...there was a need for healing simply because the nature of the circumstances had done something to violate the nature of the relationship. I had done something that had hurt him and in that context there's a violation of trust. ...not just trust but also a violation of expectations.
>
> ...the thing that needed healing was the fact that I now perceived my dad as being able to reject me. He could have done that because of what I had done. I had wronged him, I had done something that was bad and was really going to cost him. And the possibility of rejection was there.
>
> ...in my own mind I had created the scenario that Dad rejected me. I don't know why my mind reverted to that instantly, but... I was afraid that Dad was just going to reject me... tell me I was not worthy, tell me I was stupid. There was him there and me here and there would be no closeness between us.

John had injured the love relationship and altered his connection with his father. John acknowledged this and desired the wound to be healed. He desired his character to be restored. He desired the closeness he once shared with his father. John's desires may reflect those found in the broken relationships of humanity.

The acknowledgment of the injured connection and the choice to seek forgiveness

Once John realized the threat his wound had brought to the nature of the love relationship, the desire for forgiveness intensified within him. He longed for resolution, and he sought it out, hoping his father would find it in himself to forgive. If the opportunity for resolution tarries, or if it never comes, it appears our identity must undergo the long pain of reconstruction.[1] But if the gift of forgiveness is granted, John's story reflects that we are free again to be ourselves and to live in the freedom of mutual respect and dignity. If we have injured our loved one and weakened our bond it appears that in the touch we "feel" our relationship is strong again, and our character is restored. Forgiveness was sought, and when received it was verified by touch. John spoke of the moment when forgiveness and touch coincided:

> (It) was a powerful moment. I didn't know how to respond. As a kid I don't think you do. And you feel ashamed, and you're not sure if you can believe him. But the way (my father) said it... I remember him sitting on the couch and leaning forward and looking at me, looking at me sternly in the eyes. I looked down because I remember feeling so ashamed. I knew that he meant to be serious, I didn't know if I could accept that. But I also knew Dad was serious when he said I forgive you.
>
> I just remember crying, I was crying and saying, "I'm sorry Dad." I was really broken. And he just got up and put his arms around me and gave me a big embrace, and he said, "Son, I forgive you." He put his arms on my shoulders and brought me in close. I remember putting my arms around his waist. I remember squeezing him for a brief moment, and then I put my head to the side of his chest. I looked up at him and he smiled.

John's story gives us opportunity to view the need for forgiveness through the eyes of a child. The clear emotion of John's experience provides vision and energy in the search for the essence of the forgiving touch. John felt his character was tainted and when he received forgiveness he felt his character was restored, but it was not until the forgiving touch that John was convinced of the restoration. In his father's embrace, John knew that his character was restored and that he remained significant in his father's eyes:

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1 In the following chapter Joseph's story illustrates such a reconstruction.

> Again, we were father and son and he wanted closeness with me. I feared that he'd never want to be close to me. But after the forgiveness and the embrace you know that the person still loves you, he's still going to do nice things for you, he's still going to tell you that he's proud of you, he's still going to want to invest in your life, that's not going to change.
>
> ...to be held by my father, and to feel his forgiveness... in his arms and around my shoulders, somehow... it just wouldn't have been complete without his touch. I heard the words, but I felt very much like a little boy inside. Like here I was this little kid inside that needed to be hugged, and told that I'm okay. And without that touch, I think because I'd known it before and had been held by him when he told me he loved me--not having that would have been devastating.

Without touch we can experience forgiveness; this is unquestioned. But without touch, the line at which our character is restored, the point at which we know our bond has reawakened, may be blurred. Touch appears to provide a moment when our preverbal emotion speaks within us; touch appears to reveal the reality of our forgiveness, to speak to us on a level deeper than words, saying we are forgiven, we are restored. John's interpretation of his experience reflected the meaning it held for him:

> The touch is a restoration. It confirms. Somehow the words between family members or close friends, words cannot convey what touch can convey. And in that moment with my dad... he could have affirmed me verbally but the fact that he held me was even deeper than what words could have done at that time.
>
> The touch meant in that moment that I understood he totally loved and accepted me. And he didn't reject me. Without question I knew that. ...when he hugged me authentically, it meant that he loved me. And I was significant and special to him.

In his father's embrace John no longer questioned his perception of himself, or his father's perception of him. The touch confirmed to him on the deepest level that he was meaningful to his father, he was significant.[2]

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[2] The discussion of forgiving touch as an experience deeper than words suggests to some that forgiveness involving touch is deeper and more complete than forgiveness without touch. The present study does not seek to claim that touch in forgiveness produces more complete forgiveness, but rather that touch adds a unique dimension to forgiveness. For John, the experience of forgiving touch deepened his knowledge that he remained significant in his father's eyes. Joseph's experience of touch may have fortified his own identity, but it in no way reflected a stronger bond (or a forgiveness that could be defined as mutually complete) between he and his mother. Throughout the interview process, each of the participants related that touch was valuable, perhaps necessary, for forgiveness to be sealed, or validated, but this does not mean that forgiveness without touch cannot be genuine and profound. Touch may deepen certain aspects of the individual's lived world, but it does not necessarily mean that forgiveness itself has been made more complete.

The touch deepens our bond

For John forgiving touch not only reawakened the nature of the love relationship and restored his character, it deepened the bond between him and his father. The value of their connection had been tested by injury, and forgiveness proved to them their love was stronger than that which came against it. Out of the struggle for forgiveness emerged not only the former nature of their bond, but now a new and stronger nature, a nature confident in the future and in its ability to weather the storms of life and relating. First there was closure; there was the healing of the wound. Second there was deepening; there was a new belief in the strength and vitality of the father/son bond. John's interpretation of the forgiving touch spoke of the bond's deepening:

> The significance of touch is closure. It gives you an image in your mind that when you think of that person, you think of that image you have of them. You no longer see all the hurtful things that have gone on, all those are softened now by a touch. Because you have that memory, you feel that other person. And when you feel another person, that's a powerful memory, and in that way touch really does something to your bond. You are united by touch.
>
> Touch is a very powerful sealing element. You make up and part of the making up process is to reinforce it with a touch.

Touch provided finalization; touch sealed forgiveness. Interestingly, the word seal rises from the same Latin origin as the word significance (Ayto, 1990). Its meaning in this case--'little mark or picture'--came to be used as a mark distinctive of a particular person, a mark (or seal) by which a particular person can be identified. By the seal of a monarch's ring the monarch's identity was known. So too the forgiving touch may be a seal by which we identify our forgiveness and our love with a particular person. John was forgiven and he remembered the embrace as a symbol of his special significance in the eyes of his father. John's comments on the forgiving touch are uniquely telling:

> The touch of forgiveness is connected to somebody else. It's not just something that you do in and of yourself. ...an act of forgiveness is mutually exclusive with someone else. So it's a memory bonded to another significant person. The touch of forgiveness is not just an event that happened, it's a person it happened to.

The forgiving touch sealed John's forgiveness and in the seal he was moved from a position in which he felt mistrusted and shameful, to a position of equality in the love relationship:

> ...what forgiveness and touch does is it puts you on the same level. The other person doesn't hold power over you. You don't feel inferior. ...when I feel threatened I feel inferior. But in the forgiveness with my father... for that moment we were equals. We were two people coming together out of our own heart and we met as equals. As partners. And we saw each other as that and we loved each other as that.

Sealing, closure, confirmation... the forgiving touch was each of these, but it was also a strengthener of the bond. John's story reflects that when we are "touched" and forgiven we have truly let bygones be bygones, we have released the pain of our wound and allowed ourselves to heal; but more than this we have discovered a new vitality in the love relationship. The forgiveness and the touch have convinced us that we are able to acknowledge hurt and rise above it. Our love for each other has become deeper. John spoke of this deepening:

> ...fears go through your mind. But touching says the friendship that we have is there again. The underlying father/son relationship is back intact but now it's deeper. It's not the start of something, it's the continuation of something. And so it reaches a higher level in the fact that you're aware in your mind that things did not have to keep going together. I mean, you could have split apart and that would have been the end of it. But it's a coming together so it's another notch, it's another marker that deepens the relationship.
>
> Forgiveness is another memory that locks that relationship, that takes it to a deeper level. In touch and forgiveness you can really gain respect for the other person. Now you know you're stronger than the forces that try to tear you apart and that gives you a lot of confidence in the relationship, when you can overcome things together. When there's not forgiveness in a relationship, you're stuck at a certain level. You can never grow, you stop. But when you work through forgiveness and say I forgive you, I love you, and you embrace each other... you're going deeper. Every time there's forgiveness in a relationship after a violation, you go a little deeper. It brings you into a closeness again. There are forces that can tear you apart, but you become stronger than those forces.

John felt the forgiving touch set the growth of the relationship in motion again. It moved him deeper in his view of self, in his perception of how his father viewed him, and in the nature of their bond. When there was no forgiveness the future of the love relationship was halted; his thought of growing deeper with his father was plagued by shame and

doubt; he believed he was resented and seen by his father as distrustful. In forgiveness the future was set in motion again. Plans could be made once more, be they of time together, of a mutual endeavor, of a shared dream or of any form of relating. The future was no longer haunted, its uncertainty was no longer fearful. In the forgiving touch the future was given back to John, a bright future in which he relished the depth of a new and stronger bond.

Conclusion

John's experience reflects that one part of the search for identity is satisfied in the forgiving touch. His experience suggests we grow up relating to ourselves and others, hoping to form bonds in which our significance is valued, hoping to form bonds in which we are free to be ourselves even while we are deeply connected to someone else. John's interpretation of his experience spoke directly of this process of identity and connection:

> Inherently we are all connected somehow in soul and spirit with those around us. We cannot exist in total isolation. Our identity, I believe is formed from our interactions with others. If I have a strong identity then I'm going to feel that others do respect me, that I'm a worthwhile person, that the things I do in life are respected by other people and are liked by other people. Again, the connection with people. I think our identity is formed in our ability to relate with others on a human level. It's hard because a lot of who we perceive ourselves to be is what we think others see of us.

John revealed the experience of a 12 year old boy, an experience that may in a few elemental ways mirror the experience of humanity. John's interpretation of his experience suggests we value our connection to others and their perceptions of us, it suggests we hope our love relationships will maintain unity and closeness. Yet John's story also implied that even as we value and even as we hope we realize it is not possible to be in harmony with everyone. John provided a poignant example of the role forgiveness plays in identity when forgiveness in a love relationship may not be a possibility:

> If you have an abusive father, or a father who is a continual drunk... and he still is very crude, and gruff and degrading to you every time you're around him, it's going to be hard for you to accept yourself as a good person, or as a worthwhile person. But I think understanding you've done as much to bridge the gap that you can and that the potential for a healthy relationship is there as far as you're

> concerned, then I think you can have a certain peace in your identity, in that your identity is based on the fact that you are willing to bridge the gap. It hurts when that person doesn't want to respond. It hurts deeply. But I believe when you know in your heart you've forgiven them... there's a strengthening of your character.

When our loved one has not opened themselves to or acknowledged the need for forgiveness we may find it difficult to be confident in our identity, or to believe that forgiveness has restored us. Without mutuality in forgiveness we may never "feel" the restoration of our character as we do in the touch. Yet even when forgiveness is not received, in the end we may realize forgiveness still reflects the restoration of our character, the resurrection and re-establishment of our sense of self. John's thoughts suggest that eventually we may come to this belief, for we realize that we have done all that is expected of ourselves, we have acted with all our human dignity.[3] The power of the forgiving touch may be most evident when forgiveness is given and received in mutuality, for then, as John's interpretation states, the forgiving touch speaks immediately and truthfully of the restoration of our character:

> After forgiveness there is a reinstilling of confidence. When you know you've wronged someone you want to believe that person thinks you're a nobody. But after forgiveness... I can remember that with my dad, I just remember wanting to hold him. He gave me a big hug. The embrace reinstilled a confidence about who I was in his perception.

"The touch restores"; these are words John used to describe the forgiving touch. The etymological roots of the word restore can be traced to the Latin *restaurare*, the common meaning of which is 'to restore, rebuild, repair' (Klein, 1967). It is not only the love relationship but also our character, our identity, that is restored, repaired, rebuilt. The original meaning of the Latin *restaurare* is believed to be 'to attach again to a stake, to fasten again' (Klein, 1967). When we have wounded the love relationship and there is no forgiveness it may feel as if an integral part of our love has broken off, has come undone. Just as John, we may float in uncertainty, the peace and freedom of our bond may be

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[3] Joseph's story, in chapter seven, explores further the thought that forgiveness and the forgiving touch, even if not received or understood by our offender, may yet reflect the restoration of our character and the vitality of our identity.

terribly out of reach. In unforgiveness we may discover that touch has become a tense reminder of the integral part of our love that has broken off, that has come undone. In John's case the part that broke off had to be fastened again, it had to be attached once more to the stake of intimacy he shared with his father. Forgiveness was the fastener, it was the element that took what was broken from their love and attached it again. Touch verified to John the strength of this attachment. If the touch was wary, he would have doubted their reunion. But the touch was full and true and within it John perceived their bond was strong again, and he doubted no more.

The current English definition of restore is 'to give back' or 'to make (something) look as it looked originally by repairing, retouching...' (Webster, 1990). In the forgiving touch John was given back his character. By the external physical embrace he was 'retouched' so that internally, emotionally, he looked again as he had looked originally.

The stories of the individuals in this study suggest that the more valuable the love relationship, the greater the effort we exert to overcome the wounds that separate us. Forgiving touch may be a pure statement of our hope to preserve love; it may be that which provides closure to a time of pain, reveals the restoration of our character, and begins the new vitality of the loving bond.

CHAPTER 7

RELEASING THE PAIN OF THE PAST

...the first step toward forgiveness is to acknowledge feelings of resentment and hate. When people experience severe hurts, they usually end up hating the persons who caused these hurts.

(Seamands, 1981, p. 350)

...when we live from the heart, we forgive from the heart, from that center where offender and offended are one, where healing has its roots.

(Steindl-Rast, 1984, p. 200; cited in Halling, 1994, p.112)

There is an experience of reclaiming oneself, which, at the same time, involves a shift into a larger perspective. No longer does one see oneself in a relationship of victim and victimizer: One is freed from the status of being the object of another's actions and so is able to return to oneself.

...A sense of responsibility for one's life and relationships is recovered.

(Rowe et al., 1989, p. 242)

Introduction

Joseph's story is the story of forgiving in the relationship that "wasn't". In the other participants' stories the love relationship was established, strong, and mutual in dignity and respect. But in Joshua's case the connection was severed very early and never regained the love that was desired and hoped for by Joshua. His story reveals the painful side of connection when mutual forgiveness is entirely necessary, but the offender refuses to acknowledge or seek forgiveness for the wound they delivered. At age three Joseph was separated from his mother physically, but it was the emotion of this separation that caused such lasting damage. Where once there was the closeness and intimacy of a mother and her child, there became only distance and painful emotions. In other relationships Joseph might expect to give and receive forgiveness and see intimacy restored. Such forgiveness would be mutual; the hurt would be acknowledged by both members of the love relationship, the forgiveness would be granted by one and received by the other. This is the ideal, this mutuality--an honored example of humility, respect, and unselfishness in our own identity and our connection to others. But in the bond between Joseph and his mother the hurt was not acknowledged by both parties, in fact his mother denied the injury

entirely, and mutuality in forgiveness became an impossibility. From Joseph's exp
it appears some injuries come to the love relationship with such viciousness and
care that our sense of identity can only writhe in the pain's intensity and struggle to
the confusion of receiving such a deep and undeserved wound. Joseph's story pro
commentary of the pain that as a young boy he could only view as malicious:

> When I was 3 years old my parents were divorced and I was raised by my fa
> ...I developed a really strong relationship with my dad and I loved him a lo
> felt loved by him. ...My mother went up to Canada. My parents were divor
> because she was an alcoholic and my father was physically abusive. She jus
> went up to Canada and lived her life up there away from us and made no con
> with us at all--she never wrote, she never called. So, I really felt abandoned
> felt a lot of hatred toward her. I had a strong need to be loved by my mother
> to be denied that was really painful for me. I hated my mom as much as I lo
> my dad. I was hurt. It was like she was dead or we were dead. There was
> nothing there. When I was 9 years old my father died and I was scared that
> mother was going to come down from Canada and try to get custody of me.
> she never came, she never even made an attempt and that was even worse; it
> cemented my feelings that she didn't care about me and she just didn't love
> and because of that I hated her.

In Joseph's case it was abandonment, in another it may be sexual abuse, physical a
parent's alcoholism or some other form of perpetration or neglect. The greatest c
forgiveness rise from such undeserved wounds. How is the self to respond, hov
self to recover from a wound that not only severs the nature of the relationsh
viciously undercuts our very identity? The origin of the word breach appears all too
for such desperate wounds. Breach is closely tied to 'break' which is believed
come from prehistoric Germanic *brekan* from the Indo-European base *bhreg-*. Fro
ancient roots the Latin *frangere* arose (Ayto, 1990), the source of the Englis
fracture. Just as in the breaking of a bone, it appears the breaking of the love relat
through a breach of such intensity can neither be healed immediately nor i
emotionally. For Joseph the healing was not a healing of the moment, it took yea
forgiveness of his mother was not granted without the costly price of deconstruct
massive emotional barricade that had risen around his sense of identity. No on
deconstruct this pain but Joseph, the one who was wounded. Joseph's interpret
his experience suggests that forgiveness is not granted necessarily for the offender,

the one who was offended; that the offended one may release the pain, and find a sense of identity that lives and breathes free of the pathology of a broken love relationship. We often feel a sense of peace when we've forgiven, this appears a time-honored truth, but Joseph's story also indicates that peace in some cases is only won by walking the long darkness of painful emotions to find for the self the light of reconstructed identity and new relationship to the world. A breach of this nature may never be fully bridged, the love relationship may never recover a life of health; trust may be too severely broken and the offender may have fully relinquished opportunity for the blessing of the love relationship. Yet in light of Joseph's struggles forgiveness appears a necessary element of the identity's reconstruction after such severity. As Joseph related of his mother, and Miriam of her father, forgiveness can take place without touch; touch is not the element that makes forgiveness what it is. But when touch occurs it appears to carry a certain preverbal power that cannot be found outside touch. As Joseph related, touch gives a physical and unmistakable signal of the release of past pain and the forming of a new and stronger identity, an identity from which one may relate with freedom to the world. Joseph's experience implies that even when mutuality in forgiveness is unavailable, the forgiving touch can yet lift the burden of unforgiveness and represent the identity's restoration.

The fall of character versus the damaged identity

In chapter six it was noted that John injured the connection between he and his father, and he felt his character diminished as a result. John acknowledged the injury he had delivered and sought forgiveness. Joseph's situation was completely different; his mother deeply wounded their connection, she never acknowledged the wound she had delivered, and Joseph's identity suffered under the burdens the wound had caused. John's character suffered as a result of a hurt he perpetrated against loving connection; Joseph's identity suffered from being severely and undeservedly wounded. In the forgiving touch, John sought the restoration of his character. Joseph, on the other hand, touched his mother as a

recognition of the identity he had fought to recover, and the forgiveness he had struggled years to give.

It may be because our identity is so tied to those who are significant to us that forgiveness is necessary to free us. The severe wound, such as described in Joseph's story, may require forgiveness more for our own peace than for any obligation to the offender. It appears that in a wound of such depth we find it very difficult to escape the disillusionment, the utter displacement, the despair and hopelessness associated with the wound. Without the self-transformation contained in forgiveness, our identity may become so full of desperation and lifelessness that self-destruction takes hold of us through means such as emotional instability, abuse, addiction, psychological withdrawal, and suicide. In Joseph's case forgiveness allowed him to step outside the cycle of victim and victimizer; the forgiving touch symbolized the personal development of esteem and identity to the point that releasing past pain became more valuable than the desire to harbor hatred and the will to avenge. Joseph's experience validates the thought that forgiveness and intentionality are interwoven. Forgiveness was a choice, a choice not necessarily for the healing of the love relationship, but for the healing of the self. In forgiveness Joseph made a decision to be different than his mother, to free himself from her:

> Knowing I had a deep seeded hatred for my mom, and knowing that she was an alcoholic and the fact that I'm a Native American Indian may predispose me to become an alcoholic, I really feared that I might become like her if I didn't work through my feelings.
>
> I didn't want to become an alcoholic and I didn't want to be a parent that left their family and just denied their existence and made no contact with them at all. I knew how much pain that caused me and I didn't want to do that to a child of mine, or a family member of mine. So I wrote her this letter and I sent it to my oldest brother in Canada and I asked him to forward it to her. I do not know to this day whether she got that letter but what really matters was that in my heart I took a step of forgiveness and basically said to her, "I know that you're a stranger to me, but you are my mother. And I thank you for life. I want you to know that I don't feel like you've done anything for me. I don't feel like you've been my mother. The family that I live with now, the mother of that family is the one that I know as my mother--she's the only lady that I've ever called Mother. But I feel that I need to forgive you. Not because you've asked for forgiveness, because

> we've never spoken. But I need to forgive you because if I don't then I may become what I don't want to become.

The need to forgive deep undeserved wounds may be best understood in this statement: "I need to forgive you because if I don't then I may become what I don't want to become". The emotion that emerges from such wounds is powerful enough for self-destruction, it is mighty enough to steal a person's desire for life and their hope for intimate connection. If the self were allowed, it might just give up altogether and die after an injury so severe; humanity contains many such examples of the relational hopelessness that ends in suicide. But humanity also contains many examples of lives who chose to forgive and to live free of the burden of deep undeserved wounds. Forgiveness may be the courageous energy that moves the identity toward reconstruction. Forgiveness, in such cases, might not reawaken the former nature of the love relationship, but Joseph's experience suggests it may reflect a strong sense of identity able to release the pain of the past and move in personal freedom toward a future and a hope. In many instances of forgiveness, touch does not occur. But when touch accompanies forgiveness, it may mark the truth of an identity free of victimization and the burden of past pain.

The experiences and interpretations provided by the individuals in this study suggest the forgiving touch may be important for its ability to reawaken connection and for its role in the restoration of character, but its value may be greatest in its ability to speak of the strength of identity. Without the choice to forgive it appears a large part of us remains tied to the destruction caused by a severe wound to the love relationship. The emotion of the wound may consume us and we may live life from a heart torn by shame, anger, hatred, and a heightening desire for revenge. Even if we never explicitly recognize such emotions, it can seem their control over us is unchallenged and we may find ourselves questioning if there is meaning outside our pain in this world. Joseph's story reveals that the threat of the loss of connection normally brought on by a breach in the love relationship can go beyond threat; the loss can be forced into reality by the unloving action and subsequent denial of the

offending party. In such cases, not only has the offender wounded the love relationship, they have denied their fault and eluded responsibility for the immense damage they have brought to the bond. Such action on their part is an affront to connection, an affront from which the relationship will never recover unless they acknowledge the depth of their wrong. Yet in most cases of severe abuse or neglect such acknowledgment never comes, and in its absence we may be left to pick up the broken pieces of our identity and our ability to connect with others.

For much of humanity it is no great challenge to hope in a nurturing relationship and believe it will come to pass; but for others a traumatic moment in the life span may fracture the will to form meaningful connections. In such times it appears forgiveness becomes necessary for the preservation of self. This is not in any way an allowing, a condoning, or a denial of the graveness of the offender's action, for to deny the existence of a wound that destructs the core of the love relationship is to deny human dignity. Rather, forgiveness declares that the wound was incurred, but further, that the wound will not stop life, it will not stop in us the will to survive. When we forgive deep, undeserved wounds that are unacknowledged by the offender we may be choosing to release the pain they've given us, we may be choosing to live life from a whole rather than a fractured sense of self. In many cases the offender's action may be so severe that it seems to have consumed our identity entirely. Forgiveness may bring identity to life again as it releases the burden of past pain.

Joseph's connection to his mother was established for the first three years of his life. The abandonment terribly injured this connection. Joseph eventually acknowledged the injury and its threats to his identity and his ability to form loving connections. As he acknowledged the injury and its threats he made an initial decision to be free of his mother's wounding. This commenced the way toward forgiveness. Joseph's story suggests the way out of such wounding is long, and pain does not merely fall away; it

lessens slowly over years and decades. He learned more healthy ways of expressing his pain when it surfaced; in forgiveness he had released it and so it no longer clenched him in its anger, its hatred. His view of self changed from victim to survivor, and from survivor to an identity free of his offender's will. Forgiveness may enable us to stand outside the injustice and offer grace (though it may be entirely undeserved and never acknowledged) in order to allow our identity to gain strength, to develop, to move forward liberated from the restrictions of emotions whose result is the destruction not only of self, but of our connection to others. Joshua related how forgiveness may be a long and painful process of identity reconstruction:

> As the years have gone by I've had to come to terms with different aspects of... forgiveness and... reconciliation with my mother.
>
> Even though I had written this letter as 7th grader I still had a lot of feelings and a lot of hurt there, unresolved emotions. There were some issues there that needed to be settled. And I never once said I love you to my mother, I just said I forgive you. And I think those are two different things for me.
>
> The first time we ever talked on the phone I was 16--it was a really strange, awkward conversation--there wasn't much speaking involved. Just a lot of silent times on the phone, and a lot of moments of hesitation, of not knowing what to say and not knowing what to ask and just the basic uneasiness and discomfort. And at the end of it she said, "I love you, Son," and I could tell that it was kind of a searching statement, like she was trying to give me a cue to say I love you, Mom, or something along those lines. I didn't have it in my heart to say that, I just said, "Yeah, I gotta go now." I said good-bye and as I did I heard her swearing as she had slammed the phone down.
>
> That was pretty traumatic for me because I felt that I should have been able to say I love you, Mom, but it was just at that point I was unable to. She was just a stranger to me; it would have been an empty statement. It would have meant nothing to me.

When we have been severely wounded emotions such as hatred must run their course for a time. Yet even from severe wounds, Joseph reveals that forgiveness can heal us to the point that we show love again to our offender; this is the transformative energy of forgiveness. In a relationship in which there was once only fear, hatred, and shame, forgiveness can heal us so completely that we offer love when hatred would be purely justified. Joseph's choice to forgive eventually lifted his burdens of fear, hatred and shame. In Joseph's case, and in others of deep wounding it appears touch can be a

statement of our forgiveness; before forgiveness the mere thought of touching our offender is immediately repulsive, but when we have chosen to forgive, touch becomes a demonstration of the unexpected reversal of pain. If anything, our offender may deserve violence, not tenderness. So when we choose the tenderness of touch as the expression of our forgiveness we may be transforming a relationship in which we only experienced weakness into a place in which we have demonstrated personal strength, unexpected grace, and dauntless courage. Joseph's story is telling in this regard:

> I was praying the whole time to myself, just, God, I'm going to be strong, I'm going to be strong. I was pretty emotional, I was ready to cry. My mom stood across the room and... here's her 18 year old son. She's never been a part of his life, she's had no contact whatsoever, and she's never heard the words I love you come out of his lips. And I'm sure she's scared of rejection. I'm sure she's scared of a lot of things. We've never talked openly about her alcohol or anything like that, it was just kind of a skirted issue.
>
> Then she said, "We have to drive back to Canada and it's about a 9 hour drive." She was making small talk and she was kind of at a stand still, she didn't know what to say. I walked across the room, took about three steps and put my arms out and she took a step towards me. I embraced her and said, "I love you, Mom." It was the only time I had embraced her and it was a real strong moment. It was like the ending part of the story of forgiveness--for my forgiveness of her. It was just healing for me to reach out and say, I love you, Mom. It was like saying I forgive you, I love you... it's okay.

Why touch the one who has offended you?

In the midst of Joseph's story the question becomes, why the need for touch? Why not just say I forgive you, or let the letter so many years before speak for itself. Why embrace the one who offended you? Again, in the words of Joseph, we see the communication latent in touch; touch symbolized the final release of his pain, it clearly spoke the power of his emotion, it became the moment when forgiveness and reality were one.

> If I had not embraced her I would have felt like the words, I love you, were just lip service and not genuine. It was an act of love to embrace her, an action of love. If I had not embraced her, I don't think that she would have felt that as strongly, and I would not have felt like I did after I had embraced her.
>
> The embrace had a lot to do with forgiveness of all those years of abandonment and pain, and hatred towards her. It was like I was healing her. I felt she had a lot of pain too, and I felt sorry for her. She'd had a hard life as evidenced by her

> face; she's got a lot of scars you know. And a lot of those scars are because of what she did, because of the pain of living without your son.

Forgiveness may lift us out of our own pain to look in empathy on the one who offended us. This does not mean we respect their action, or validate their wounding of us, but it may be the point at which we begin to acknowledge our own pain as well as our overcoming of it, and from this new position we are able to look on our offender with compassion. Joseph's experience demonstrates that from the strength of a reconstructed identity we can offer love again to the one who initially fractured our view of love. The embrace Joseph gave his mother may have symbolized his identity testing the strength it had gained in the long process of forgiveness. In the forgiving touch he may have seen just how far his identity had come:

> ...I believe I need to show love. That's one of the greatest commandments of my belief. Especially towards someone like my mother. For me not to be able to do something like that would really show my lack of depth. I think that was a huge growth point for me. Maybe because I felt like I was beginning to put love in my life, to allow love into my life and allow myself to love others.
>
> For me the touch was a feeling of affirmation in dealing with this: yes she's my mother, yes she's an alcoholic but at the same time I accept her and I choose her. Just because she's an alcoholic doesn't mean I'm going to become an alcoholic. And I love her, I accept her, but that doesn't mean I will accept that lifestyle for myself. I believe in the lifestyle that is of strong quality, love life, live in a lifestyle that is joyful, that has hope, that has faith in a higher power, God in my case. I believe in living.

For Joseph the touch released past pain as it signified the reality of a new and confident identity. The touch communicated an openness to renewed relationship, but it no way depended on the development of that relationship. In fact, in cases of deep unacknowledged wounding it is likely the offender will be unable to respond in a healthy way to renewed relationship. Nevertheless, in Joseph's case the touch was given as a release of past pain and an indication of a uniquely powerful way of relating. The reaction of the offender no longer carried weight in the heart of the one who was offended. Forgiveness was not granted in weakness, but in strength. Forgiveness was given to release the identity from the burden of the injury, and to free the identity to love others without the pain of the past damaging an ability to connect in deep and loving ways. In

situations such as Joseph's, though undeserved, love in its most true form may be what is offered to the offender; the response of the offender, no matter how limited, uncaring, or even hateful it may be, does not taint the nature of the love given by the offended one. As with Joseph, forgiving touch may not symbolize the restoration of the love relationship with an offender who does not acknowledge their wounding of us. Yet when touch is given despite the offender's denial it does appear to symbolize the restoration of something. Perhaps this is when the forgiving touch represents identity's restoration. Perhaps, as in Joseph's case, the touch reflects a reconstructed identity free of the fragile will and debilitating emotion inflicted by our offender:

> It was an ending of a lot of painful childhood emotions of abandonment. It was an acceptance of well, she was really incapable of showing love. Even when I was 18 years old, she was not able to show love really. It was not a relationship that you would call a mother-son relationship. There was not that strong bond. It was an ending of a book, the struggle of not having that love from her. It was also the beginning of, hey, I'm not going to follow in her foot steps. And it was awesome. It was like a new outlook on life towards my mother that began at the same time that the old outlook had died in the embrace. A lot of insecurities died in that embrace. I came to accept my past and not be ashamed of it. Before, I was probably ashamed because I related closely to it like, this is me, this is who I am, and I could not really look at it objectively, I couldn't remove myself from it and make my own life. When I embraced her I was able to look at it objectively and say, this is my mother but I am going to be different.
>
> After that embrace, at the point of embrace, my outlook changed on a lot of the painful emotions. I felt I was able to not be ashamed so much of my past. I accepted my past... I was proud of my past after that. Whereas before it was an insecurity. I was insecure about the fact that my mom was an alcoholic and that she wanted nothing to do with me at all. And really, holding her for those few seconds felt like, it's okay, she's done some things for me that are very valuable. Number one she's given me life. And I'm very thankful for the gift of life. And she's given me heritage, she's given me a past that's remarkable. And as I grow older I am able to understand and empathize better with people that come from the same background as I do. That has been very valuable in my outlook towards life and towards working with young people, and people that have hurts similar to mine.
>
> I felt I was giving her strong love. That's what I was giving. A real love, a genuine love. The fact that she did not respond really to that over these last 6 years does not discount the power of the moment or the touch.

The severity of the fracture and the healing that eventually comes to such a raw and open wound may reveal one of the meanings latent in the forgiving touch. Joseph's story demonstrates that in forgiveness we give of ourselves as we give away the pain we have

incurred. The origins of the word forgive are found in the Latin *perdonare*, the source of the English *pardon*, which was formed from the two Latin words: *per-* 'thoroughly' and *donare* 'give' (Ayto, 1990). The underlying sense of these words is 'to give wholeheartedly', and this too appears to be an underlying meaning of the touch we give to the one who fractured the love relationship. In the forgiving touch we hold nothing back, we open ourselves to the one who so offended us, we do not keep from them our love... we give wholeheartedly. If we make the choice to forgive we may be giving love, we may be giving of our new and stronger self, we may be giving the original and human hope of connection in all its intimacy and truth. Joseph spoke of the wholehearted giving he experienced by embracing his mother:

> I felt a lot of emotions in those few seconds of touch. I think my strongest emotion was of love; I love you, Mom. I accept you and I forgive you for everything that you have not done for me as a mother. Another emotion for me was of maturity. I really felt like I'm handling this in a way that is right, I'm doing the right thing here. Maybe that was just my self-serving biases, but it made me a lot more confident as a person because I felt I was dealing with the situation in a way that a sound, strong individual would. I felt I dealt with it in a healthy way. It was a real warm feeling. I was giving to her a gift... the gift of forgiveness. Even though she might not even realize that's what it was, it was what I felt. I believe a lot of healing can be done in one's heart when they give an embrace of forgiveness. As you forgive, things take place that are healing.

<u>When touch itself has been violated</u>

The forgiving touch appears to be a good thing, possibly even an element that validates the completion of forgiveness within the self, but it is not easily given and in cases of severe abuse it may at times be unwise. The difficulty, even the impossibility of the forgiving touch at times, must be noted. In physical and sexual abuse the nature of touch has been violated. What was meant to be tenderness enveloped in personal respect has been cruelly bent to meet the will of the offender. This creates a fracture so severe the love relationship may be broken forever.

From Joseph's account it appears forgiveness remains a necessity in order to heal self-identity. Yet Joseph went a step further; though his mother did not acknowledge her wrong, Joseph embraced her to enforce his forgiveness. But can the same step be taken when touch itself has been violated? What if the sexual or physical abuser does not admit wrong. In this case, it seems likely that touch would be purely vulgar even if forgiveness has secured itself in the heart of the one who was wounded. Here, the forgiving touch that would affirm the healing of the love relationship may never transpire. This was true in Miriam's experience concerning her father's rejection. He never acknowledged he had wronged her, yet she chose to forgive him and in her forgiveness she eventually experienced the healing of a very wounded identity. There was no touch involved; even so, she noted her healing in that she was able to treat her children differently than she had been treated as a child. Touch can be a valuable aspect of forgiveness but it appears there are situations in which trust has been so abused, and touch so violated, that the forgiving touch may not be warranted.

Arguably, forgiveness is necessary to reconstruct the crumbled identity and to be free of emotions that torment the self and burden our ability for healthy connections in the world. But touch is not required to ensure forgiveness. Nor is touch required for the identity to arrive healed at the end of forgiveness. Touch may be the symbol of reunion or of a strong identity, but forgiveness can do its work without the benefit of touch. In fact, if touch was violated originally, to give our offender the forgiving touch may be something so wrapped in fear, anguish and bitter emotion that it cannot become a reality. Such absence of forgiving touch is understandable and may even be necessary for the safety and continued preservation of the self.

The value of forgiving touch in deeply injured connections

In some cases of violated relationship it is understood the forgiving touch may never come to pass. The death of the abuser is one such instance. If the abuser is alive, the threat of continued abuse and the dangerousness of the abuser may also necessitate distance. Nevertheless, the meaning of the forgiving touch in those instances when it can occur remains significant. If we choose to demonstrate our forgiveness with touch we may experience a form of healing that can never be experienced outside touch. The forgiving touch appears to add something physical, something tangible to our forgiveness. If we are able to so completely deconstruct the barrier we have placed between our self and our offender that we can touch them in forgiveness, this appears to ground our experience of forgiveness in a way that may not be possible without touch.

Joseph's story demonstrates that touch can be the release of past pain and the declaration of the reconstructed identity. Yet Joseph also spoke of the forgiving touch as something that cannot be forced. It appears we cannot fool ourselves into giving the forgiving touch without having the reality of forgiveness securely in the self. The forgiving touch cannot be given dishonestly; in such touch, communication may be too clear for dishonesty to go unnoticed. For Joseph, as for others in this study, touch communicated the reality of the decision that was already made in the heart.

> Touch makes it genuine, it shows there is a realness to what is being said or what has been said. If I had not said, I love you Mom, I think she would have felt that anyway. I think she would have felt that she was accepted. But if I would have just said I love you and not given her an embrace, I don't think she would have perceived it as real strong love.
>
> It was real healing for me to embrace her. For so many years I had said that I forgave her, now it was the moment of truth, being able to actually put this into my life by showing her forgiveness, by saying I love you and embracing her. If I hadn't forgiven her there was no way I could have done that. If I would have tried it without forgiving her it would have just left a bitter taste in my mouth. It's hard to fake non-verbal, especially touch. There's some intangible aspect about an embrace that is very revealing as to what is in the soul. It's difficult to fake that.

> It was the first time I recall us having an intimate touch of any form. It felt like the first time we'd ever really touched. Like the first time I'd given myself openly, unguardedly.

The forgiving touch was for Joseph an indication of the transformation his identity had undergone. A relationship in which he was entirely closed and guarded became in the touch a place of unguarded openness. Joseph's words suggest such vulnerability is part of strong self identity and the ability to make positive connection with others:

> An embrace is the touch where there's no guarding. It's incompatible with guarding--you can't at the same time be in an embrace with a person and be guarded against that person. It's like trying to be worried and relaxed at the same time. You really can't do it. A person can say something... not with their mouth, but you can see it in their eyes and in the same way you can feel it in their arms if it's real, through their touch and the strength of their embrace, how long it lasts, is it quick, does it push away, does it linger.

By embracing his mother Joseph allowed himself to be vulnerable. For all he knew his mother might not have received his embrace, and it is likely she did not understand it for the forgiveness it was imparting. But this may not be essential. What may be essential is the giving of our self, the reality of our identity experienced in the touch, an identity that has become strong through a long and painful era of reconstruction.

<u>The touch as a reawakening of the bond even after severe injury</u>

The intensity of a wound can eliminate all desire for connection with the offender, but the intensity of forgiveness may re-establish the opportunity for connection. The forgiving touch may open a place in which the original bond can once more be acknowledged. As seen in Joseph, this acknowledgment, again, is not for the benefit of the offender, but is a gift given by the one who forgives. In truth, the gift may go unnoticed by the offender for in denial of the wound the offender is also closed to the opportunities and acknowledgments that are a part of the gift of forgiveness. So the touch may be incredibly meaningful to the one who forgives, while it goes unnoticed by the one who has fractured the love relationship. Ideally, the offender would recognize the touch for what it is, admit wrong, and ask forgiveness for the brokenness of the love relationship. But such taking of

responsibility is normally outside the realm of the one who offends through sexual abuse, physical abuse, abandonment and other losses of similar nature. Even so, the forgiving touch may be an acknowledgment of what was originally meant to be; it may be an acknowledgment of a love relationship founded on mutual respect and on dignity from one human being to another. Joseph related this in his words:

> (The touch) was an acknowledgment of the relationship that existed between us as a son and a mother. That bond had been re-established and recognized and acknowledged in the eyes of others. If I was giving her something I was giving her her son back... in the sense that I was giving my heart to her as a son and looking at her as my mother. I was acknowledging that she was my mother, yet realizing at the same time she most likely wouldn't act on that and she wouldn't involve herself any differently after we touched. I gave her the freedom and the opportunity to be there. And for that moment in time she was my mother.

In previous chapters the forgiving touch was revealed as the reawakening of the former nature of the love relationship. Even in the context of a deep, undeserved wound it appears the opportunity for this reawakening remains. Certainly the offender would have to take responsibility for wounding us in order for the reawakening to occur. But even if responsibility is never taken it appears the one who forgives has gained an identity robust enough to offer the opportunity for reawakening knowing this opportunity will likely go unwanted or unnoticed. The wounded one offers restoration; this may be most clearly understood in the touch. In such cases, the response of the offender is not as important as the action taken by the one who forgives. Joseph related that even in rejection, the personal meaning of the forgiving touch would not be diminished:

> Even if she would have just stood there, in effect rejecting my touch, I still would have embraced her. But it was different than that. I could see the hesitation and I remember walking toward her. She was real hesitant, in her eyes, she was very unsure of what to do. I just started walking. I remember she took a half-step toward me and as I was walking towards her I had my arms out and I was looking into her eyes. In the beginning of the embrace I said to her, I love you, Mom. My left arm was underneath her right arm and my right arm would be on top of her shoulder. Her hair was kind of in my face, it was real close. So our bodies were close to one another and I remember having my hand on her back and just squeezing her to me, and holding her strongly for a few seconds. I made sure that it felt strong, not weak.
>
> If she would have rejected the embrace that would have probably just made me feel stronger in what I was doing. It would have drove my emotions further to the

point of saying, I'm doing the right thing here and regardless of what she doe
regardless of what she's capable of, this is what I need to do.

Conclusion

When we are wounded deeply, undeservedly, and the offender is unwilling to adn
wound and seek forgiveness the love relationship may be severed completely. The
desires, and expectations that were inherent to the dignity of the love relationship ma
be destroyed. We cannot seem to simply forget the wound, for to do so would be t
our self to annihilation. Our disagreement with the denial, our emotions of violatio
anger and hatred, our desire to see the wound avenged, appear to be the only respons
enforce human dignity and as such we embrace them. Considering Joseph's expe
such a path seems necessary for the identity to come to strength again. Painful em
may be the first step out of the unhealthy connection with our offender; it may
necessary distance, a valuable and powerful psychological movement that begi
change in us internally from a stance of destroyed identity and helplessness to
reconstructed identity and personal power. To complete this movement it appears
some point hatred and the desire for vengeance must be shed; they may be necessary
time, but as Joseph's experience demonstrates, we realize they too can destroy us
end. From an objective reality outside the connection to our offender it appears we c
a place of forgiveness so that our identity can progress, and so that we can offer our
harmony the opportunity to love again. Forgiving touch may verify the reality of ou
harmony for it appears we cannot cling to hatred while we touch in forgiveness. Jo
experience suggests we must release the one to experience the other.

In the forgiving touch Joseph not only released the pain of the past, he released the
fisted grip of hurtful emotions that burdened him inside. Hatred, bitterness, and the
avenge no longer suffocated him. He stated, "You forgive so that you can move
grow as a person, and not be held back." The release of past pain that Joseph

speaks of this moving on, it speaks of the truth that in the forgiving touch we understand our identity was not destroyed but has been reconstructed and is free again to love and be loved, if not in the original love relationship then in other relationships that are significant and meaningful to us. Joseph reflected on the necessary release of past pain and the emotions closely tied to that pain.

> If I had felt like I wanted to give pain back to my mother... I probably could have just totally disowned her and tried to shame her. And I suppose I could have felt some kind of satisfaction and some sort of revenge on my part. Like, you hurt me, I'm going to hurt you now. But instead I was forgiving her. I was giving her the gift of love. It's like I was saying, "It's past. It's over and I accept it and I accept you. I don't want to cause you hurt, and I don't want to cause you pain. If anything I want you to feel love, and I want you to love me."

The etymological roots of the word release are found in the Latin word *relaxare*, meaning 'to let go' or 'to leave behind' (Ayto, 1990; Klein, 1967). It seems appropriate then that forgiveness may only be realized by the letting go of painful emotions and the leaving behind of that which hinders or impedes the strength of our identity. Again, the metaphor of a burden being lifted presents itself.

"A baby is born with his hand closed in a tight fist, an old man dies with his hand outstretched. If we do not let go, life will tear it from us." (Dobson, 1995). These words may represent the process of forgiveness; if we do not let go, if we do not lift the burden of unforgiveness from our identity, our identity may suffer death under the weight of our wounds--the will to live may be torn from us by the burden we refuse to release.

Joseph's experience suggests a heart of resentment finds it very difficult to establish mutual respect in connection to others. A broken identity, possibly the result of malicious wounding received in love relationships, may not be able to connect with others in a healthy way until forgiveness has been chosen. In the context of forgiveness, touch may declare the release of past pain and the fortitude of the new identity we have formed.

CHAPTER 8

HEALING THE SHAME: THE RETURN TO ONENESS

Without forgiveness there can be no peace--the world can only moan and travail, controlled by its past.

(Phillips, 1986, p. 15; cited in Bauer et al., 1992, p. 51)

I forgave and was forgiven. And I experienced a cleansing/healing from my resentments at a deeper level than I'd ever known before.

(Seamands, 1981, pgs. 351-352)

The vision of newness is so compelling, so like a gift of grace, one will not choose other than to move gratefully into it. The future--an immediate sense of being on the verge of new beginnings--is again available where before it was not; the past, although neither forgotten or rationalized away, is no longer a haunting, heavy, and troubling issue.

(Rowe et al., 1989, p. 240)

Introduction

Chapter six spoke of the fall of character experienced when we have wounded a loved one. Part of the perception of diminished character related by John in that chapter was a feeling of shame. John's story was told from the eyes of a boy who felt his character might depend on whether or not his father was willing to forgive. In this chapter, Peter's story is told from the eyes of a man whose shame was tied to a secret life that had not been revealed to his future wife. John's shame was momentary, while Peter's shame had been something he struggled with for most of his adult life. Shame was certainly a part of John's experience, but it was not so immense as the shame Peter experienced. Therefore it becomes valuable to take an in-depth look at the role of the forgiving touch in relation to shame.

The initial portion of this chapter explores the healing of shame found in Peter's story. The subsequent portion looks at Miriam's story to consider the forgiving touch in the restoration of oneness.

Shame

Shame is 'the painful feeling arising from the consciousness of something dishonorable or improper' (Random House, 1980, p. 805). For Peter shame was associated with and intensified by the injury he had caused and by the threat of altering the loving connection he shared with Ashley. He could not escape the feeling that he had let her down. His shame burdened him until he revealed what he had done. In the context of the wound he saw his identity as worthy of condemnation and deserving of emotional and physical distance.

Shame becomes most visible when some hidden and hurtful action we've taken is uncovered. The loved one discovers our harm and is shocked at what we have kept hidden. In Peter's case, shame had gathered itself for a number of years, increasing its hold on him through various rejections of his attempts at honesty, and in his failure to find the healing that a loved one's forgiveness can bring.

Shame can take on many faces: we are ashamed of how we hurt our loved one, but also of how we hid that hurt, denied its existence to them, hoped it would somehow fade and hoped the wrong we committed would remain forever undiscovered. We may lie to protect the self for we know if our wrong is uncovered it would mean condemnation and possibly the end of our love. We may cover it up to keep what semblance we have of a strong love relationship, but all through the cover up we know that something infectious is slowly destroying our bond. Even so, we may tell our self we cannot reveal it for we fear the result of such a discovery; we fear we will be seen as an evil and distrustful person; we fear our shame may be deepened when we are rejected by our loved one. Peter felt that if he continued to cover up his shameful action, he might be running from the only exposure that could bring truth and health back to his connection with Ashley. His story suggests the risk involved in uncovering our wrong may have to be taken if we are ever to be forgiven, if we are ever to reawaken the true nature of our bond. His struggle was that of every

person who has ever wounded a love relationship: forgiveness is necessary, but we fear the vulnerability of admitting wrong. Sometimes this fear is so great we choose to shame and vulnerability of admitting wr[illegible]ken our bond. In deny we ever wounded our loved one; but such denial will never reawaken our bond. In chapter seven, Joseph's mother provided a poignant example of the danger of denial; her denial succeeded in keeping her from loving connection to her son even when he offered her this opportunity over 15 years after the original wound.

The word shame is derived from origins that meant 'a covering' or 'to cover with clothes' (Klein, 1967). It is not surprising then that we often hide what is shameful to us and do what we can to keep it from exposure. Shame appears to be something we protect, something we cover with the heavy cloak of secrecy, hoping in our hiddeness the shameful action we have taken will not come to light. "What they don't know won't hurt them," we reason. Yet if we are honest we know such logic is unconvincing. We sense that the wrong we have committed, if it is deep enough and cuts at the core of our bond, may add to the erosion of the love relationship and may in the end be a participant in its final crumbling. To be shameless, we sense we must reveal ourselves.

Peter's story represents the process of revealing a hidden wound, of opening our shame to our loved one. Peter felt that he could never truly be shameless, fully healed of his shame, without uncovering it. For Peter it was the uncovering that finally placed his wrong before his loved one and left her the choice to forgive or not to forgive. Uncovering his wrong--exposing his shameful action, feeling ashamed of it, risking the end of the relationship--was something he chose; and though the uncovering was to him an excruciating experience, it was also something that he felt had to be done for the preservation of the loving bond. Peter's action injured Ashley, it altered their connection. Peter desired to right this wrong and so he sought Ashley's forgiveness.

When we have injured our loved one and altered the connection we shared it may produce extreme anxiety, for we may feel helpless to change our situation in and of ourselves. All we can do it seems, is hope our loved one is merciful and forgiving. Even as Peter admitted wrong he knew that Ashley could choose not to forgive, yet he admitted his fault, for he felt dignity could not be preserved if he denied what he had done. In the frailty of admitting fault the true strength of connection may be revealed; for even if we do not receive forgiveness, we have been true to our own self, and we have strengthened our opportunity for honest connection with the world.

The heart of shame

A wound to the love relationship may first be a wound to the self. Based on Peter's experience, shame appears to shake the structure of our identity; it seems to cry out to us of the need for forgiveness and if we ignore this cry we may find our identity locked in dishonesty and the self-hatred that is often born of dishonesty. Peter felt his actions of indulging in pornography, and eventually prostitution, were a wound not only to his future wife but also to himself (especially in relation to his belief in God and his intimacy with God). Peter's shame is shown in the opening words of his story:

> I had been indulging in pornography here and there. And a fair bit of masturbation. I went on this company trip and I was out in Saint Marie, hormones going crazy, staying alone in a hotel that night. I called up one of these call girls in the phone book... a prostitute basically. She came over and that was when I lost my virginity. The first time in my life; I hate that day. Even now it's very hard to think about because I hate the thought. That was the grossest, grossest experience of my life. I felt very dirty in the act, in everything, there was no real heat of passion. She was laying there, cold. A terrible experience. The touch was incredibly gross. There was no warmth there, there was nothing. She left. I cried. Begged forgiveness of God.

Our identity may be able to discard minor wounds to the love relationship without much thought, but any wound we deliver that is a clear threat to the nature of our bond seems to become a thing of shame in us. Such shame may only find its healing in forgiveness, and in forgiveness a forgiving touch may unfold in which our identity actually "feels" the

healing of its shame. Before forgiveness, however, the turmoil of an identity colored by shame may dominate us. Peter's story speaks of this turmoil:

> ...I met my future wife, Ashley. We dated for a while. We got engaged. Anyway the urges were high and I went to a massage parlour and that whole routine. When I came out of the massage parlor I thought, what did I just do?!
>
> My hormones race so much to the point that I can't wait to get in there and then almost half way through an orgasm the guilt comes. It's absolute pleasure for a man up to that point but then the guilt comes, and the thoughts: I blew it again; I made a mistake; I failed. I felt disloyal, I felt I had betrayed her.
>
> ...Ashley was not there at that moment for me to cry out to so my mind started to spend time thinking about it.... I got heavy hearted. I knew almost the instant the orgasm passed that I had to tell her to ever have a chance to be free from the sexual bondage--to have the freedom and know that I could be trusted by my wife, and to know that I could have somebody to be accountable to that would love me, and help me.

In the shame and guilt of the injury we have caused, we can do one of two things: we can try to hide the fact that we have wounded our loved one, or we can expose what we've done and hope in their willingness to grant mercy. In denying the hurt we may increase shame within our own identity and the loving nature of our bond may become impossible to sustain under the weight of the wounds we hide. Peter felt that in hiding his shameful action he would stop the growth of his bond as surely as if it was stopped with an open and blatant wound. He could have covered it up, he could have acted as if all was well or all was the same, but he felt such dishonesty to self and to the honor of the love relationship would eventually halt his connection with Ashley. For Peter forgiveness was the only power that could set growth in motion again, and he felt forgiveness would never be reached if he continued in denial and secrecy:

> When I betrayed her it made the growth of the relationship come to a crawl or a standstill. I don't think true growth can happen when there are secret sins, or something that has not been completely out in the open. You can't move on when there are things holding you back. How deep can you get when you know in the back of your head there's this thing hanging over you.
>
> I told her that I wasn't a virgin and that was a hard thing to tell. A person hates to tell their weaknesses. A person hates to admit that they're wrong... but I think it's necessary and it's justice.

Certainly there are those who live with the shame, who never reveal the hurtful action they have committed against the loving bond. In such cases it appears a hardening takes place in the self, a shunning of necessary shame and a refusal to be honest about personal fault. This can occur, and the love relationship may even continue, but the nature of the love relationship will always be shrouded in falsity and the will of the identity to connect on deep levels may be denied. Peter shared this thought:

> If I could have lived with my conscience, which I'm thankful I couldn't, but if I could live with my conscience I just think it would get down to worse things in the future. And those things would have eventually drove us apart. If I hadn't addressed it at that point my conscience would have hardened and maybe I would have started doing things behind her back on a more frequent basis. That would have driven me further away from her. She'd be kept in the dark and then she wouldn't know where I'm at and I'd be living a secret life.

To harbor shameful action a part of our identity seemingly dies. For the identity to be strong, Peter's experience (and that of Joseph's mother) suggests truth must envelope our connection to both self and others. Perhaps this is the great tension we feel when we have brought harm to a relationship that is very meaningful to us. Perhaps the role of shame is to point us toward the opportunity for forgiveness. Peter further revealed shame and his response to it:

> I remember my conscience killing me. And then discussing this with Ashley. I took her for a drive, she was wondering what was going on. We were very serious about marriage at the time. I took her to the top of the hill, there in Redwind Park. We sat on a park bench and I proceeded to tell her what I had done.
>
> I was holding her hand. I was very teary.... I told her what I had done and asked forgiveness and explained to her that I understood if she could not deal with it... and probably through my past experience I expected she wouldn't be able to. I expected the worst. I felt destroyed because I didn't want to lose her. I knew how great she was. How wonderful she was... and I did not want to lose her. But I knew that in order to ever have a chance at defeating this I had to be open.... I had to tell her or I couldn't live with myself.

Peter's words may be more literal than metaphorical. "I remember my conscience killing me," he said, "I felt destroyed...."; "I had to tell her or I couldn't live with myself." Our sense of self-identity, or at least a substantial part of it, may not be able to maintain vitality if we do not take responsibility for our own wrongs. If we choose to relinquish

responsibility for a wound when it should rightfully be ours, we may kill a portion of our self... we may destroy some of our identity. Certainly we go on living, but our identity is something that now harbors falsity and if we allow such an identity to continue we may find it very difficult to relate in meaningful ways to the world; some of the self, the true self, may have died. Here we see the value of our shame and its ability to call us to expose the wound we've brought to the love relationship. Peter acknowledged his shame even though he knew exposure might mean the end of the love relationship. If Ashley would have been unable to forgive him then their bond would not have continued. Peter related the fear that accompanied this possibility:

> I was scared. I had to let her know about my past. It was something that I had to do in myself, to explain who I am and my terrible past, and to say, please still love me. It was a painful experience....
>
> I knew I couldn't continue the relationship from my end knowing what I had done. I was too afraid, I figured if I don't tell her, then I can definitely never, ever marry her... because of my own feelings, because of the way I am. I would be too scared that I would blow it in our marriage.

Peter's fear and shame intensified in the time between when he exposed his wrong and he awaited forgiveness. He hoped to be forgiven but the condemnation he felt he deserved seemed so much larger than the hope of forgiveness it became difficult even to imagine grace being extended. The wound to connection and the shame he felt over this wound seemed to create in Peter a sense of helplessness, a sense of being driven uncontrollably by the dread of what may happen:

> ...the fear welled up and I was thinking, oh no, she's going to tell her mom and dad. Now I'm really going to be found out. Her family will think I'm scum. I didn't want that. I wanted to be loved by them, I didn't want to be looked at as this person who was evil. I was afraid.
>
> She went home for the weekend and I had a really tough few days... on the edge. I was praying the relationship would survive. It was a crossroads, and I wasn't sure. I really wasn't sure at that point.

Peter feared how his fiancés parents would view him should they discover the hurt he had brought to the love relationship. Again, shame is associated with wronging a loved one,

and the subsequent uncovering of that wrong. In our shame, our own identity a

suffer. Peter related this thought:

> People want their character to look good. People want to be loved for wha
> People want their character to look good. People want to be loved for what they are, but they also want to present what they are. We don't want to say too much because we might incriminate ourselves. We don't want people to see too deep inside us.

Shame moved Peter toward the hope of forgiveness. Peter's story reveals that touch can clearly communicate forgiveness, and in touch the healing of shame can begin. The shame that formerly gripped him faded and he began to have hope in himself and in the bond he shared with Ashley. In the healing of his shame he felt his identity had become strong again. A fragile and halted future was strengthened and set in motion; Peter could look to the future with the hope of growth and continued connection. He expressed how the touch communicated the healing of his shame, and in this healing the strengthening of his identity:

> Ashley's touch of forgiveness at the piano said something to my character. It said, you're a man. It said, I want to know about you. I want to know and care more about you. She expected me to be myself, to be me. That embrace probably took off so many layers of guilt in my life. It told me I am a man. ...it made me feel like--yes, I can be a husband.
>
> The touch says, I understand; I want to understand, I want to be there for you, I touch you to let you know that you're not scum, you're loved by me, you're respected by me.

In previous chapters the forgiving touch was said to communicate the reawakening of connection, the restoration of character, and the release of past pain. In Peter's case, the touch also communicated the healing of shame. In the touch, Ashley removed Peter's shame and gave him confidence in himself and in the future of their love:

> Touch brings you very close. Touch also proves there is no separation. We understand touch much better than words. ...there always has to be a point of embrace to feel that forgiveness. To see if it's real.
>
> Touch really reveals healing... it reveals the heart. It reveals what we are.
>
> Her embrace made me desire to never fail her again. Because of the pain I put her through. Because of the pain I went through... that separation time.

...when a person has failed and there's an embrace, the embrace is multipl
huge numbers just because of the acceptance. There's a peace--you're rel
the burden is taken off of you.

The original meaning of forgiveness has been defined in the words 'to give wholeheartedly.' Ashley's forgiveness of Peter was experienced as a wholehearted giving, and in its fullness Peter's shame was lifted off, and his hope was restored. He was welcomed again to the opportunity for truth and depth in the love relationship. Miriam's experience, the final experience to be investigated, also speaks of a welcoming. Her story suggests that in the forgiving touch we welcome our loved one back to oneness.

Oneness

Oneness can be defined as the unity and peace we enjoy in a loving bond. It may be experienced as a lack of emotional distance, the presence of emotional freedom, the reality of shared intimacy. Miriam's experience suggests a deep wound places our oneness in grave jeopardy. When we are wounded we may find ourselves questioning: Will I let this bond and this person remain significant to me after such a wound, or will I just let the relationship die? This was the question Miriam considered and in the anger and bitterness that first came from being wounded, the death of the bond seemed to her the only option for the preservation of mutual respect. Her story relates her struggle.

> One summer my husband had a flirtation going with another woman. There was no physical involvement but it was very painful emotionally for me. He had asked me to forgive him and I decided to give it a week to decide my course of action. At the beginning of the week I was leaving, I was out of here. ...knowing my personality, the wound of rejection goes very deep, and rejection creates a lot of rage.
>
> To put it very bluntly he was on my shit list. Right then there wasn't anything I liked about him. I felt I'd given him the best years of my life, that I'd worked like a dog to build our business.
>
> He knew I was very unhappy and that I was going to be deciding whether I was going to stay or leave. Our intimacy level had probably dropped back to about one.

Each case of injury in the context of love relationships is unique, and
connection is altered is als[illegible]ue, an[illegible] In Miriam's case, the intimacy she or
her husband h[illegible] intimacy she once sha[illegible] her experience emotional di
her husband [illegible]. In her experience emotional distance came to
symbolize the bond's [illegible] lack of oneness and it revealed itself in the way she and her husband looked at each other, the way they talked, and the way they touched. The relationship was forced and each person knew they would be unable to experience depth again until forgiveness had come:

> The breach brought a lot of mistrust into it. Fear. There was no safety in the relationship at that point. There was no trust in the relationship. There was no communication other than reporting of fact, of let's say, daily maintenance living... for example, about the children, or about decisions in the business, or things like that. It was a deep valley, believe me.

Miriam valued oneness in relation to her husband and she felt her husband valued oneness in relation to her. Yet when she was wounded she questioned the value her husband placed on their oneness. She doubted him and she became unwilling to allow him into her intimacy. If he is going to wound me, she reasoned, then I no longer want to be one with him. Miriam felt she had made herself vulnerable by giving him her heart; thus, when he wounded her she felt his wounding showed no respect for what she gave. Miriam suggested that this is why we fear forgiving those who have wounded us, for they may just turn around and wound us again. She suggested we keep our forgiveness from those who hurt us, in order to protect our self. Initially Miriam felt that if she forgave her husband, she would be jeopardizing her own sense of respect in the relationship:

> ...I spent time because I didn't want to forgive. I felt like I was giving something up if I forgave. So there was a struggle within myself. My personal respect would have been eroded. I felt like I was going to go backwards and give up part of myself again. That part of me would die if I forgave him. Part of my self-respect would die.
>
> Because of the rejection I felt as a child it was a re-wounding. ...I was feeling terrible rejection. I was feeling terrible anger because I had done such a good job, and it wasn't enough, and so there was hopelessness in that, like what more could I have ever done.
>
> There are thoughts of, even if I do forgive I'll never be able to trust him again. If he did it once, he'll probably do it again.

on as it was before. Miriam and her husband had become two separate and distinct entities, almost enemies, distrusting one another and questioning the bond they once shared. The relationship seemed to have been dismantled and oneness was no longer desired, let alone experienced.

> ...the breach destroys--it destroys. It's like an acid. It destroys everything around it. You're thinking is colored. Your feelings are either frozen in anger or numbness and you see no good qualities in the other person. And that stops you from wanting any deeper emotional or physical contact.

Miriam took a week to think about her next course of action. Initially her emotions were filled with rage and the desire to retaliate by ending the relationship entirely. But eventually she came to recognize that she valued relationship over separation. She in no way condoned her husband's action, but she made the choice to be vulnerable again, to allow him back into her intimacy and her oneness; she chose to forgive him. She spoke of the process of coming to a place of openness again, a place of intentionality in which vulnerability is risked for the sake of oneness.

> I feel if you're used to intimate physical touch and you've been wounded, you protect yourself from that wound and it's an unconscious barrier that you put up as protection so that you won't be vulnerable again. That's why during a time of unforgiveness the touch has to stop, because physical touch is inside your body space. So if I have a lot of layers of protection around me I can't let anybody in to my body space. ...And then what happens is you become more and more isolated in the world and you experience less and less touch, and a part of you dies.
>
> Once you choose to forgive it's like a crack in the wall, and a little bit of sunlight can come in and nourish the person.

Miriam's interpretation suggests that oneness may be impossible without vulnerability. For another person to know us intimately she suggests we must be vulnerable, we must allow them into our intimacy. If we give ourselves openly to a loved one and they wound us, we often retreat. We may feel they have taken advantage of our vulnerability. Miriam's experience demonstrates that even though it is undeserved, in forgiveness we approach our

touch appears to be a symbol of this vulnerability--arms open, baring to the one who wounded us a direct opportunity to wound us again. Our heart is bared, our stomach is bared, and we carry no emotional shield, no armor to protect the most vulnerable parts of us. We open to our loved one and we forgive. Perhaps we forgive to symbolize our desire to return to oneness, perhaps we embrace to see our desire become reality.

> Vulnerability is valuable because you can't have intimacy with walls. You can't have intimacy unless there is vulnerability. The more you protect, the less the other person can know. So the more you're open, the more the other person can know you, but the more vulnerable you are to wounding. So I don't feel forgiveness is totally complete until you make that step of vulnerability emotionally. The reward for vulnerability is growth, community, oneness with others. The physical embrace is an outward manifestation of your inward decision.

Miriam's experience was similar to Joseph's (see chapter seven) in that she was explicitly intentional with forgiveness. Inwardly she decided she would forgive, she decided she would welcome her husband back to connection. She decided their unity was more important than what had divided them. She forgave, and she used touch to dissolve the emotional distance that had broken their oneness.

The touch shows plainly, beyond doubt, that we have forgiven, that we have constructed the bridge on which our loved one can return to us. For Miriam, oneness was cherished before the breach, despised and rejected during the ensuing distance, offered again during forgiveness, and demonstrated in the touch.

> The analogy of a relationship is the two shall become one. If you're in unforgiveness you're not one. But the embrace, symbolically, brings you back to oneness.

Conclusion

Peter related that in receiving the forgiving touch he recognized he had been healed of shame. Miriam related that in giving the forgiving touch she gave the opportunity for her

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ever be restored. The
aring to the one who

and her husband to return to a place of oneness. Their st
implies healing and renewed connection, and touch testifies
the strength of this connection. Both the healing of shame

the strength of this connection. Both the healing of shame and the return to oneness are complex human experiences, Peter and Miriam's stories demonstrate they are as difficult to work through as they are fulfilling to attain. Such healing and such oneness does not appear to naturally follow a deep wound. Rather, healing and oneness may only rise from the difficult process of engaging painful emotions and being vulnerable enough to be wounded again.

The stories of Peter and Miriam were similar to those of the other participants in this study in that they spoke again of a burden lifted off, and a restoration experienced. The long burden of Peter's shame was lifted, and the oneness of Miriam's connection to her husband was restored.

CHAPTER 9

FINAL REFLECTIONS

The strong of soul forgive...
(Gibran, 1928, p. 39)

Introduction

Joshua, Sarah, John, Joseph, Peter, and Miriam ascribed personal meaning to their experience of the physical touch. They touched physically, but the emotional touch made the experience meaningful. Each of them provided an understanding of a moment in their world when touch coincided with forgiveness, and their stories suggest the forgiving touch may be the result of an intentional choice undertaken to honor both the self and the love relationship. This decision was followed by meanings such as the lifting of a burden, the erasing of doubt, and the experience of restoration. Within these meanings were other, more specific meanings: the reawakening of the former nature of the love relationship, the restoration of character, the release of past pain, the healing of shame, and the return to oneness. In the forgiving touch the emotional distance between us and our loved one appears to be symbolically, metaphorically, and physically dissolved. We meet and there is no longer distance, there is only closeness.

Renewed connection took place in the context of a certain process. In each case there was an established or wished for connection (the love relationship). Then something wounded this connection and the bond was altered. Invariably the wound had to be acknowledged by one or both parties, for without such acknowledgment forgiveness could not occur. Finally, touch was both part of the process and its apex, the decisive point at which forgiveness was acted upon and sealed.

Participant experience and interpretation has led me to this final chapter. I conclude by looking again to the foundations from which the guiding question of the study arose. Clinical and personal origins are briefly focused on and the text is explored in light of its implications for theory, research, and clinical practice. Finally, my personal experience of the hermeneutic phenomenological method is included, and limitations of the study are discussed.

Theoretical and research implications

> ... it is likely that the failure to forgive, not just our parents but ourselves and other people in our lives, stands in the way of our development as persons who are free of unnecessary restraints from the past and illusions of human perfection.
> (Halling, 1979, p. 193; in Rowe et al. , 1989, p. 233)

This research developed from a clinical and personal understanding of the value of forgiveness and touch, as well as the limitations of available literature in which touch and forgiveness are mentioned together. As chapter one demonstrated, in current research touch is acknowledged as necessary for human development, and forgiveness has received increasing attention, but the role of touch in forgiveness appears to have been unexplored. On the whole, the study of forgiveness remains overwhelmingly represented by natural science methodologies. As such, the majority of research in this area remains removed from phenomenological human experience, and from the expression of human meaning associated with experience. Even so, studies that echo human experience and give voice to human meaning appear to be on the rise in current literature. Notably, this increase is reflected in a handful of recent human science studies of forgiveness (Fisher, 1985; Rowe et al., 1989; Rovaletti, 1991; and Halling, 1994). Yet even these experiential explorations of forgiveness are largely silent concerning the human meaning that exists when touch and forgiveness coincide. Considering the limitations posed by a natural science investigation of touch and forgiveness and the relative silence of existing human science studies, the hermeneutic phenomenological approach was undertaken to investigate the forgiving touch.

In this study love relationships burdened by unforgiveness were described as being in the shadow of doubt; participants related that the nature of the bond was uncertain, its future was halted or blocked--doubt filled every aspect of continued relating. The forgiving touch was an affirmation that forgiveness had taken place. Such meanings as a burden lifted, a restoration experienced, and doubt erased were common to each participant, but beyond these meanings, individual and personal meanings were interwoven in their experience. Elements of existence that moved individuals to physically touch their loved one and "feel" the peace and healing promised by forgiveness were interpreted by participants in their own narratives and by myself in the hermeneutic phenomenological text. Meaning appeared to be so closely tied to the experience that participants could not relate the context of their stories without also relating their personal understanding or interpretation of them. The forgiving touch was understood as something "touching", as something that was personally moving.

The goal of this research was not to develop a step by step procedure that can be defined as forgiveness, nor was it to supply a set of stages by which we can say the forgiving touch occurs. Rather, the personal stories of six individuals were explored with the goal of creating a text that would reflect their experience of the forgiving touch. Such a text is merely one interpretation of the experience and as such it presents textual possibilities of human meaning. The text is not a definite set of rules or guidelines, it is simply a way of investigating some of the meanings that accompany human experience.

In light of the possibilities of meaning presented in this study, it becomes valuable to briefly reconsider literature related to the forgiving touch. Natural science, as defined by van Manen (1990), is the study of objects of nature, things, natural events, and the way objects behave. He defines human science, in contrast, as the study of persons or beings that have consciousness and act purposefully in and on the world by creating objects of

meaning that express how humans exist in the world. With this distinction in mind the inadequacy of natural science to reflect human meaning is apparent and a brief consideration of studies that may relate to the forgiving touch becomes appropriate.

Theoretical studies often present stages or theory-based understandings of forgiveness (Smedes, 1984; Lambert, 1985; Hargrave, 1994). Such studies suggest a general or universal approach to forgiveness. In contrast the narratives and interpretive text in this study suggest that the forgiving touch might be better understood in the context of an individual's lived experience. In this context, specific meanings of the forgiving touch rise from the context of each person's life. Certainly meanings universal to forgiveness, such as the significance of maintaining human connections, were touched on by participants in this study. Yet every meaning, even general ones, were related from the uniquely personal experience of a single individual. Thus it can be said the meanings of the forgiving touch may be productively explored in the context of an individual life, including the life content, relational background, family history, world view, and modes of expression that are inseparable from the individual. This method seeks to ensure a detailed, specific, and personal understanding of a given life experience.

Where I perceive this form of published literature has fallen short is that forgiveness and forgiving touch are defined too simply. In this study I found the meanings that emerge from the experience are multifaceted, they are difficult to neatly outline. For some the touch reawakened a loving bond, but this aspect of meaning was denied for others (such as in Joseph's case). For one participant the touch was a healing of shame, for another it was more a restoration of oneness. For one the unforgiveness was momentary, for another it lasted years. The experience may have differing meanings for a son or daughter than it does for a parent, and the context of the experience differs for every individual. Certainly the reality of a need for forgiveness must be acknowledged for the forgiving touch to

transpire, yet this is a complex process uniquely meaningful to each person, not necessarily a general progression of stages.

Human science studies on forgiveness promote an understanding that rises from individual experience and the detail and specificity associated with individual experience (Rowe et al., 1989; Halling, 1994). Such studies represent a mode of research that has been largely overlooked, though their benefit to a scientific understanding of forgiveness appears to be rich. The use of human science methodologies has provided personal and detailed depth to underlie theoretical and conceptual depth, and specific focus to clarify general or universal meanings. The present study maintained a specific focus on touch in the context of forgiveness. Human meaning, presented by the stories of six individuals was interpreted with the hope of bringing greater depth to the study of both touch and forgiveness. Further research in which the human meaning of forgiveness and touch is explored and a text of richness and specificity is created may prove valuable. In addition, such research might also be developed in areas of human experience as yet unexplored such as: the look of unforgiveness versus the look that opens the possibility of forgiveness; the experience of conversation or verbal interaction in unforgiveness and in forgiveness; the experience of nonverbal interaction in unforgiveness and in forgiveness; and the experience of personal peace in both situations.

Methodologies focused on human meaning may clarify and enrich the current struggle to understand forgiveness. For example, the forgiving touch presents new metaphors for the experience of forgiveness: affirmation that a fracture has been healed, that a debt has been erased, that emotional burdens have been released, and that restoration has come. This study suggests the touch can occur whenever an intentionality of forgiveness comes into being, and it illumines the process of such intentionality in each individual. From participant experience it appears necessary to go through volatile emotional wanderings

before one can come to the point of offering a forgiving touch, but current literature may not reveal the depth, the complexity, and the difficulty of finding a way through such emotions. Clearly, the emotions surrounding a wound to the love relationship cannot simply be discarded. In fact, in the case of a severe wound that is denied by the offender, such emotion may advance even to the point that self-annihilation becomes a viable alternative. The transformation experienced in forgiveness and demonstrated in the forgiving touch is an emotional journey of war to peace and each person confronts it with their own specific meanings. Though forgiveness appears intentional, a way cannot be forced through the blockade of emotions that keep a person from forgiving. For this reason, a detailed look at the dimensions of experience and meaning that moved people from resentment to forgiveness to touch becomes important. In this study, the broken trust brought about by a wound appeared to be overcome in self-struggle and through eventual self-surrender to the vulnerability forgiving and touching represent. Here in the detail and concreteness of human meaning an understanding valuable to research, theory, and clinical work presents itself.

The threats posed by unforgiveness appear to shake up our way of relating to the world. In this study the forgiving touch meant that meaningful relating was again within reach; it may be that the foundations of our connection to humanity are fortified in the forgiving touch. To be touched in forgiveness may be to be welcomed again to a place of significance in humanity, the touch may symbolize belonging, it may fulfill the need for meaningful connection pointed to by studies such as those of Harlow on contact comfort, Spitz on touch, and Bowlby on attachment. With this in mind, further inquiry into the emotional process that leads to self and relational transformation may prove valuable.

As psychologists we often recognize clients' denial of emotional wounds. But what role does denial play in client experience and how does it impede the transformative experience

of forgiveness? Once a wound is acknowledged, how do resentment, anger, rage and other significant emotions influence our transition from emotional bondage to emotional freedom? Such emotion, in retrospect, appears necessary for the self to advance honestly toward forgiveness, for the self to step from a stance of victim to survivor, and for the preservation of personal dignity. But what other personal meanings advance the self toward transforming powerlessness and broken trust to the personal power and renewed hope that rise from the choice to forgive and to touch? What parts of life and relating keep a person from the emotional and cognitive recognition that forgiveness is valuable or necessary; and what in life and connection promotes the desire for this recognition?

Difficult questions arise from the study of meaning in human interaction. What if the identity is so wounded by a breach that complete relational disintegration results? If Miriam, for example, had chosen not to forgive, the resulting marital separation may have splintered her family and produced long-lasting and painful effects for her two children, her husband and herself. The personal understandings each person brings to forgiveness are not simple strategies to be employed in order to guarantee connection; rather, they are complex and uniquely individualized.

The emotional burden of unforgiveness may move one person to disintegration and another to intentionally choose forgiveness and the strengthened connection that is often its result. Touch may move from a thing of disdain to a symbol of newly formed relational fortitude. What is it then that moves one person toward forgiveness and another to maintain the personal and relational burdens of unforgiveness? Human science studies provide possible answers to this question. North American culture often appears to take a passive stance toward forgiveness, letting it come when it will, not recognizing how intentional it may be. Taking into account our meager knowledge on this topic, further research concerning the choice to forgive, or the intentionality of forgiveness and forgiving touch, is warranted.

Personal intention appears to shape the individual's response to a crisis that requires forgiveness, but what is it that produces the desire for this transformation in one person and not in another? What makes emotions such as anger, betrayal, bitterness, and rage things to be shed in forgiveness by one person, yet things to cling to in unforgiveness by another? For the participants in this study such feelings were lived through, they were experienced, yet they were also released in order to bring about a moment when the forgiving touch could take place. If painful emotion was resisted and denied, or if it was in the end held on to, then the forgiving touch may have remained an impossibility. Research is needed that explores the painful emotions involved in unforgiveness and the self-devastation and relational destruction that is either advanced or reversed in the context of such emotion.

This study suggests that forgiveness can be affirmed in the forgiving touch. Participants implied that intentionality was an important aspect of their forgiveness, yet even if intentionality is required it appears forgiveness cannot be honestly chosen before the emotional barricade of unforgiveness is surmounted. This implies the struggle to forgive is primarily an inner struggle. Yet such an implication may not be entirely true. Participants' experience revealed forgiveness is a choice decided upon in the self, but clearly this choice is acted on, confirmed, and possibly completed in relation to others. For participants, touch became this action, this confirmation, and the tangible completion of what was internally intended. Social relations revealed the working out of emotions surrounding the need for forgiveness: in Joseph's case, much of his early relating was characterized by the anger and desperation of being abandoned; in Miriam's case, a self influenced by a physically and emotionally abusive father was paired with the rejection of present relationships to intensify emotional pain. Both Joseph and Miriam came to a point of intentionality within the self, but it was in the social context that the choice to forgive was

lived out and brought to physical reality. Thus, the choice to forgive and to touch may reveal a will to be at peace and burdenless both within the self and in connection to the world.

The experience of painful emotions may be a necessary precondition to forgiveness, but forgiveness itself and the forgiving touch appear to be primarily social in nature. Thus, the social elements involved in bonding, in attachment, or in meaningful connection to others receive specific attention in the study of forgiving touch. If a person's connection to a loved one is completely lost in unforgiveness, such as in Joseph's case, what is the response of our self-identity? How is it that forgiveness is still chosen and transformation still experienced despite the fact that the offender has not acknowledged their offense? What does such forgiveness do for us in relation to other significant relationships? Are we held back if we do not forgive? If we cling to resentment in one relationship is our ability to be intimate in other relationships limited? Further research is required to unlock many of the mysteries involved in connection, attachment, and bonding in the context of forgiveness.

Implications suggested by this study focus primarily around the enrichment of existing research, but the need to explore new territory is also indicated. The deepening of theory associated with human science investigations is foundational to what may be the principle implication for further research voiced in this study, i.e. the need to investigate touch as it relates to human emotion and understanding. Touch as it relates to such experience appears to represent a major gap in both theory and research. Certainly, the investigation of touch has been broadly undertaken, especially in attachment theory. But the personal meanings of touch in the context of not only attachment and bonding, but such emotion-laden experiences as love, fear, anger, rage, shame and grief remain essentially untapped. The present study suggested possibilities of human meaning related to the forgiving touch, a

physical experience reported by participants to be particularly powerful and positive. But what about negative experiences of touch and the human meaning attached to them? What of the experience of touch in sexual or physical abuse? Touch appears to be necessary for healthy development, it appears to be important in such aspects of human existence as attachment, connection to the world, and identity, but clearly more research is needed to understand the personal meaning associated with various specific situations of touch. What personal meanings do we ascribe to a touch that physically violates? What is the lived experience of a touch that expresses love, or fear, or any specific emotion? When one considers research on the lived experience of touch in psychologically meaningful contexts the uncharted ground reflected in both theory and research appears immense. Therefore it can be suggested that theory and research on touch, given depth through investigations of human meaning, may broadly influence the future of scientific study.

Clinical implications

My conversations with participants were intimate and deeply moving. I found myself awed by the opportunity presented in the hermeneutic phenomenological method to uncover the poignant emotion associated with human experience. Not only were participants willing to tell their story, they were willing to tell it in detail, often admitting to thoughts and actions of particular pain or intense personal shame. The fact that great courage was required to unveil such private thoughts became increasingly evident, and I felt humbled by the experience. Participants revealed their lives, they told of loss, of rage and hopelessness, and of the will to act in the midst of pain. In their telling, I was struck by the honesty and depth of meaning in each person's experience of the forgiving touch. Through my own interpretive text, my hope is the reader too has been struck by the meaningful nature of the touch. The hermeneutic text seeks to evoke the essence of a given life experience, it seeks to envelop the reader in a rich understanding of an aspect of life as it is lived. Such an understanding of the forgiving touch may influence the clinician who works with human

conflict and hopes to develop and support clients' significant love relationships. The awareness that forgiving touch symbolizes possibilities such as the lifting of a burden and the experience of restoration may broaden existing understandings of human connection, and may spark more specific clinical approaches aimed at fortifying human affectional bonds.

The complexity of the human experience referred to in this study may provide support and focus to our understanding of human conflict and the healing of human conflict. This complexity was reflected by participant stories of the shock of an emotional wounding, the intense emotion surrounding such a wound, the possible choices that emerged from this emotion, and the opportunities of personal and relational transformation presented by touch and forgiveness. In the therapeutic setting clinicians are uniquely situated to explore such emotion and its bountiful possibilities. Often clients come to therapy feeling they have exhausted their resources concerning the health of a particular love relationship. If a client has been severely wounded the future of the relationship may appear so hopeless that he or she may desire to sever the bond entirely. A wound has been delivered and our client suffers under the emotional strain of it. There is a distance, and it will not be bridged without forgiveness. The pain of the wound is a burden and the love once shared is now blanketed by resentment. If I forgive I damage my own self-respect. I cannot pretend the wound doesn't exist; it exists, and it has caused a breach. Yet how can I go on with this burden? The future of the love relationship is plagued by uncertainty and bitterness. Positive touch may seem out of reach. In such cases, an experiential view of forgiveness and the forgiving touch can open the therapeutic process for both therapist and client. An understanding of the possibilities represented in the forgiving touch may provide firm footing from which the clinician can move forward with empathy and tact.

Participants in this study experienced the process or structure of forgiveness and forgiving touch as follows: an established or desired connection, a wound to that connection, a subsequent altering or change of the connection's nature, a recognition of the wound, an acknowledgment of the need for forgiveness, a working through of painful emotion, an intentional forgiving or seeking of forgiveness, and a demonstration of this process through physical touch. The physical touch in such a context revealed that participants were back "in-touch" with their loved one. Pain was unavoidable, but when participants gave themselves to it, when they chose to become vulnerable again to further wounding--for this possibility is clearly present in reawakening the love relationship--forgiveness came and the will to reawaken love was proclaimed in the vulnerability of touch. It was not until pain had been sufficiently engaged and processed that participants chose forgiveness over resentment and loving connection over the emotional burden of separation. Forgiveness represented the possibility that pain, though undesired and often destructive to our sense of self, can be overcome and can result in a deepening of our connections with others. Certainly a deep wound can mean the loss of the love relationship. In this study, however, forgiveness suggested such losses can sometimes be restored and the loving bond can be given opportunity to awaken again. Touch was the demonstration of this restoration, the symbol of an opportunity for renewed and deepened connection. In the vulnerability of choosing to forgive and choosing to touch another, a loss of control ensues. The other person may reject us still, they may deny they wounded us and in so doing they may wound us again. Engaging in the emotional pain of a wound and emerging from such pain to offer forgiveness appeared to be a chosen loss of power, an intentional vulnerability. But it may be precisely in such losses--losses of control, of power, and of the will to be avenged--that we regain power, renew a sense of control, and restore our will to form significant human bonds free of debilitating emotional scars. By engaging our relational pain we may find our way to forgiveness and the intimacy beckoned by forgiving touch.

Experiencing pain, yet emerging from it transformed, may be the definitive metaphor of human resilience. But it appears the experiential dimensions of how we proceed from brokenness to resilience remain primarily undiscovered. The difficulty of weathering deep emotional wounds while maintaining a strong sense of identity and relational connection is continually apparent in both clinical and personal settings. Clinically, the presenting problems of humanity may be characterized on a foundational level by unresolved wounds in significant relationships. Client difficulties are often fundamentally related to the burden of unhealed wounds and the weight of unresolved threats to the nature of loving connection. The clinician who incorporates an understanding of the structure and possible dimensions of forgiveness and forgiving touch may give clients new and effective ways of confronting unresolved conflicts. Such an experiential understanding, when used in therapeutic intervention, may provide client's with an invitation to a way of relating that preserves the integrity of the self as it promotes healthy connection to others.

In the end the way to healthy connection with others, despite deep emotional wounds, may lie in submerging ourselves in our pain, acknowledging its threat to the dignity of our bonds, and finding the meaning that is at the core of such pain. As therapists, we have the opportunity to move clients toward healthy connections by upholding them in the pain of their relational wounds, acknowledging the threat such wounds bring to loving human connections, accompanying them in the struggle forgiveness entails, and encouraging the personal meanings that emerge from this struggle. Acknowledging the shock a wound brings to the self and understanding the resulting loss or diminishing of connection, the therapist recognizes the doubt, lack of trust, and broken hope simmering beneath the surface of unresolved relational hurt. In recognizing such threats to identity we invite clients to recover personal strength, and to rebuild confidence in their potential for loving bonds. Through listening, questioning, and intervention we lend understanding and support to clients who desire freedom from burden in interpersonal relationships. By

encouraging the exploration of the emotion associated with unresolved wounds clients are empowered to emerge from their experience with heightened rather than diminished capacity to form loving connections. Through tactful interview and narrative-oriented interventions such as journaling, guided imagery, and resolution of unfinished relational business the personal meanings of each client's experience are uncovered, the pressure of unhealed emotion may be released, and the pain of wounded relational patterns may begin to heal. Consistent with a hermeneutic phenomenological approach, we gain the storied experience of individuals to uncover personal meanings that facilitate integrity and connection in relation to self and humanity.

Researcher experience

If there is ever going to be healing there has to be remembering, and then grieving, so there then can be forgiving.

(O'Connor, 1994)

My interest in researching touch and forgiveness was to pursue a methodology that would satisfy clinical, scientific, and personal needs. Clinically, my interest was to formulate and promote research that may be directly applied to the therapeutic process. Scientifically, I hoped to contribute research based in human experience and applicable to human experience. Finally, I desired to engage in an exploration that would expand me on a personal level, challenge my understanding of human relationships, and fulfill my will to uncover personal meaning while doing research designed to invite healing in the heart of humanity. Hermeneutic phenomenology has proven to meet the needs I established at the outset of this study. In completing this research, the conversational element of the process was consistent with my therapeutic stance as a clinician-scientist. In each interview and throughout the interpretive process I was confronted with the intensity of emotional pain in human relations. Such a confrontation was influential in developing me further as a clinician, a scientist, and a man in relation to the world.

Touching on the clinical advantages of hermeneutic phenomenology, I believe this method researcher and participant. In seeking to understand the experiential meanings of individuals an atmosphere of respect, dignity, and trust was fostered much like the alliance that underlies good therapy. In each case, participants revealed the research had transported them to deeper personal meanings and promoted a more focused way of relating to loved ones.

From the struggle to uncover the essence of each individual's experience my own questioning skills were sharpened. Empathic responses, active listening, and congruence with the emotions presented by participants were necessary aspects of a trusting environment and as such these elements were honed throughout the interview process. The researcher is forced to implement questions that convey respect for the participant and also draw the participant into rich and often painful personal accounts. Therapeutic requirements such as maintaining focus, increasing understanding, and uncovering deeply private meanings of human experience were evident throughout this research. The opportunity to concentrate on one specific and meaningful experience seemed to generate a trust in which difficult questions could be asked and answered, emotionally vulnerable circumstances could be revealed, and powerful memories could be engaged. Similarly, such avenues of psychological intensity, therapeutic connection, and self-resolution through personal meaning are important to lasting client change. Just as in therapy, arriving at personal meaning on the other side of emotional pain was an arduous research process and the discipline of it developed me as a therapist.

In the preparatory readings, conversational experiences, and interpretive modes of hermeneutic phenomenology clinical understandings of human interaction were encouraged. Reading to understand human experience opened new ways of applying

meanings of human interaction as it deepened those already found. The researcher is in a constant mode of exploration, validation, and discovery. Perhaps most importantly, the methodology encouraged an ability to relate deeply to human emotion and experience.

Scientifically, I believe this approach addresses an important balance between empirical observation and first-hand experience. From a foundation of human experience new possibilities of empirical science may be opened and an understanding of the complexity and value of exploring the personal lived world may be specified and then broadened. Hermeneutic phenomenology requires a persevering look at the phenomena that make up our lives and the understandings that enrich such phenomena. Tactful interpretations of human experience lay the foundation for new and expanded explorations and out of such explorations knowledge is brought forth that undergirds the driving theories and research of a given area of scientific study.

Hermeneutic phenomenology challenges the dominant scientific view that claims science is real only when objective. Rather, this method suggests the truth of human experience, even it its subjectivity, can be an important contributor to scientific understanding. In this study I did not attempt to devalue empiricism, rather, I sought a methodology empirical in nature, but firmly grounded in human experience. My empirical background provided discipline, but it was also, in some circumstances, an encumbrance. The questioning, exploring, and interpreting of the forgiving touch necessitated immersion in the subjective experience of six individuals. Such an immersion in subjectivity was antithetical to my training in empirical objectivity; nevertheless, it validated my desire to understand the human condition through personal accounts of human interactions. Empiricism gave me the discipline to accurately record the experiences of the participants, but human science

formulate a reflective and provocative text.

On a personal level, this approach necessitated patience, encouraged creativity, and led me to a deeper understanding of my own experience of touch and forgiveness. Gathering descriptions of touch and forgiveness in literature, drama, art, film, and conversation was a very positive experience. The research was demanding but also moving; I was often "touched" by the experiential descriptions of the phenomenon and found myself sharing these descriptions with loved ones, clients, and larger audiences. In each case, the descriptions were received positively and on more than one occasion there was an emotional response in which the listeners shed tears. Unique approaches to questioning, listening, and understanding others developed in the interview process and spilled over into my personal and clinical relationships.

The original idea to study touch in the context of forgiveness began over two years before the completion of this project and has given me a refreshing view of humanity, but it has also been a difficult and often frustrating toil. I encourage others undertaking a similar research endeavor to persevere in the patience required to unlock the meanings of a given experience. Perhaps the most valuable aid to such patience is a team of co-researchers (in my case, my supervisors) with whom to investigate the experience in question. I cannot say this study was a smooth-flowing process, but despite its difficulties the process greatly influenced me. My commitment to healthy human interaction remains strong and due to this research it has received energy and become more focused. Participants' lives left an indelible imprint on my understanding of human connection.

Finally, this research brought new clarity to my personal understanding of my own experiences. An example of this clarity is in relation to a forgiving touch experienced

when I was 12 years old. Three years before, my father had divorced my mother to pursue a relationship with another woman. Our time together was limited to two nights a month, and my pain over the issue had steadily increased. A year after the divorce my parents came to embrace belief in Jesus Christ, my father left the young woman he was seeing, and my parents were reunited in marriage. Even so, my pain over the divorce maintained itself until I expressed a desire to forgive my father for the time he left our family. I approached him in a basketball gymnasium just after we had heard an address on forgiveness. I couldn't have weighed more than 80 pounds at the time, and he was a big man, 6'4" tall, with a strong, athletic build. I stopped about four or five feet in front of him and said, "Dad, I forgive you for what happened during the divorce." He drew me into his arms and held me. His embrace was very firm and very strong. I knew he loved me, and I knew I had forgiven him.

Since the time with my father I have experienced touch and forgiveness with my extended family, with friends, and many times with my wife. The process of researching touch and forgiveness has broadened me personally by illuminating these experiences, by validating them, and by preserving their dignity.

Limitations of the study

Several dimensions of touch and forgiveness have been presented in this study. This research was pursued with the hope of lending strength to clinical practice and generating further research in both the natural and human sciences. The limitations of a small sample size and a relatively homogenous set of beliefs in the participants are clearly recognizable, but in this research these limits may have some hidden strengths. A larger sample size may have limited the duration and intensity of conversations; and Christianity (an individualized faith in which forgiveness from God to self, and from self to humanity was said by

participants to be regularly employed) may have aided in understanding the forgiving touch.

The highly verbal and reflective nature of the participants in this study was referred to often in the text and was by the researcher classified as both a strength and a limitation of this investigation. As a limitation, the participants' reflectiveness may have blocked their ability to relate the pure experience of the forgiving touch unimpeded by their explanations of the experience. Such a limitation poses problems to the researcher's role as interpreter. In hermeneutic phenomenology (as outlined by van Manen, 1990), the researcher systematically reflects on the experience of participants and offers an interpretation of this experience. In the present study I have systematically reflected on participants' experience, but also on their own opinions which pertain to these experiences. In so doing, I may have given too much credence to participants' ideas concerning the forgiving touch, thus losing the richness associated with the phenomenological researcher's primary task of actual experience (in Husserl's phenomenology, the "things themselves").

Difficulties inherent to describing conflict, separation, and reunion posed additional limitations. As well, participants were required to remember their experience, and the difficulty of recalling past events without blurring the immediacy of an experience may have limited the study. In addition, stories differed in content and thus it must be noted that different stories with different content could be gathered, and such stories may have generated different interpretations. In considering the works of Solveitchik (1984), Lambert (1985), Stoop and Mastellar (1991), and Hargrave (1994), it is clear that differing interpretations of forgiveness can be gathered.

Despite the limitations of this study, I believe a valid description of certain meaningful aspects of the forgiving touch has been presented. In addition, as noted earlier both touch

and forgiveness have received attention in existing natural and human science literature, but it appears touch in the context of forgiveness has not previously been studied. The investigation of this experience through the hermeneutic phenomenological method may then be a valuable contribution to the literature on touch as well as the literature on forgiveness. Finally, feedback received from individuals after their participation in this study (see Appendix E) suggests that a meaningful dialogue on the experience of the forgiving touch was engaged.

From the perspective of science perhaps the most limiting factor of this research is its foundational quality of subjectivity. The work is clearly one interpretation among many possible interpretations. No attempt is made at suggesting all possible understandings of the forgiving touch have been presented here. The text is merely an attempt to shed light on a specific area of human interaction and to encourage additional research in a similar vein.

Through the hermeneutic phenomenological method I have generated a text that reflects selected dimensions of the forgiving touch. If readers identify with the text or say "Yes, this is the experience of the forgiving touch," then the meaning associated with this experience was to some extent truthfully demonstrated. If the text provides a framework of understanding, an energy behind therapeutic intervention, or a means of promoting health in human interactions, then it will have proven its value to clinical work. As human experience is by nature subjective and interpretive, the truth and meaning underlying it is necessarily validated by an accumulation of readers who point to the depth and richness of a given text. Such validation remains to be tested by those who discuss and critique this text in the ongoing exploration of touch, forgiveness, and human connection. In reflecting on the process of this research it is apparent the research was primarily founded on human experience and human meaning. My final hope for this work is that it may encourage future endeavors to broaden our understanding of healthy human interaction.

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APPENDIX A

PARTICIPANT AGREEMENT

I understand that the purpose of this research is to interpret or describe the meaning of touch in love relationships, specifically the forgiving touch. I may be asked to write or be interviewed on this topic. The researcher (Shann Ferch) is seeking to answer the question: *What is the experiential meaning and significance of the forgiving touch in love relationships?*

I agree to allow any writings I have done or words I have spoken in being interviewed by Shann Ferch to be used to further psychological research. I understand that at some point all or some of my work may appear in published form. I also understand that I have a right to confidentiality of personal information.

Please put a check mark by one of the following:

_____ If my writings or interview are used in any way, I want my name, and any I refer to, changed to protect my confidentiality.

_____ If my writings or interview are used in any way, I want only first names mentioned, to protect my confidentiality.

_____ If my writings or interview are used in any way, I give permission for my full name to be used.

_____ I want neither my writings nor my interview used for research purposes. I do not agree to be a participant in this endeavor.

In the event that I would like my name changed if my work is used for research purposes:

_____ I want to choose my own pseudonym, and here it is _____

_____ I want a pseudonym to be chosen for me.

I understand that at any time, I have the right to withhold my consent to cooperate in this research endeavor without any penalty or risk to myself. I will be debriefed on the results of this research and given the opportunity to change, alter, or withdraw my writings or interview excerpts before they appear in published form.

Some of the possible benefits of this research are as follows: to further human science research; to help professionals such as psychologists and teachers better understand people and our experiences; to promote healthy relationships in society. The inconveniences of participating in this research may involve the following: it takes some time; in writing or being interviewed, painful experiences from the past may be remembered; some questions in the writing or interviewing process may be considered personal. In case of emotional distress you may contact the researcher (Shann Ferch) and he will refer you to an appropriate source for help. The task of a participant in this research is to write one or more descriptions of a life experience or to participate in one or more interviews on the research topic. Interviews take approximately 60 to 90 minutes. They are to be conducted where it is most convenient for the interviewee. The interviewer will be Shann Ferch. Written descriptions take about 20 minutes each.

I understand that I will receive a copy of the final research proposal, if my writings or interview excerpts have been included in the proposal, or if I request a copy. I also understand that research of this sort, namely hermeneutic phenomenology, is merely an attempt to interpret a given life experience such as forgiveness or love, and describe the essence of this experience. Although this research is based in hermeneutic phenomenology, my writings or interview excerpts may be used in any way that may benefit psychological research as a whole.

Signature of Researcher _____
status: doctoral student, Faculty of Educational Psychology, University of Alberta

Name of Participant (printed please) _____

Signature of Participant _____ Date: _____

APPENDIX B

BACKGROUND INFORMATION, RECORD OF CONVERSATIONS

JOSHUA Age: 54 Occupation: President, private coorporation

Moment of touch and forgiveness: at age 51 with his 14 year old son

Conversations dates (time): 14 May 1994 (3/4 hr.)
07 January 1995 (1 hr.)

JOHN Age: 27 Occupation: Health care worker

Moment of touch and forgiveness: at age 12 with his father

Conversation dates (times): 20 September 1995 (1 1/2 hrs.)
26 April 1995 (1 1/4 hrs.)

SARAH Age: 37 Occupation: Marriage, family and child counsellor

Moment of touch and forgiveness: at age 30 with her adopted mother

Conversation dates (time): 26 January 1995 (1 1/4 hrs.)
02 February 1995 (3/4 hrs.)

JOSEPH Age: 25 Occupation: Student

Moment of touch and forgiveness: at age 18 with his biological mother

Conversation dates (time): 29 December 94 (1 3/4 hrs.)
08 May 95 (3/4 hr.)

MIRIAM Age:53 Occupation: Drug and alcohol rehabilitation counsellor

Moment of touch and forgiveness: at age 42 with her husband

Conversation dates (time): 14 May 1994 (1 hr.)
06 January 1995 (3/4 hr.)

PETER Age: 28 Occupation: Blue collar worker

Moment of touch and forgiveness: at age 22 with his fiancé

Conversation dates (time): 13 December 1994 (1 1/2 hrs.)
04 April 1995 (1 1/4 hrs.)

APPENDIX C

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Name:

Mailing address and phone number:

Age:

Occupation:

Education and socioeconomic background:

Moment of touch and forgiveness to be focused on:

Family and other background information:

APPENDIX D

EXCERPTS FROM ORIGINAL TRANSCRIPTS

EXCERPT FROM JOSHUA, INTERVIEW #1, BEGINNING SECTION

(after preliminary collection of background data and description of the forgiving touch)

Well the first thing I thought about with touch is the negative ... in that ... when you have a negative experience I think it takes a longer time to make it a positive. There has to be growth ... change ... it has to be gradual. (pause) One of the ways that I believe in parenting is that you never ... physically ... touch your children in negative ways with your hands ... with your body. For example we believe in spanking when they were young. But we always wanted to use a neutral object so they wouldn't associate the hand with an instrument of pain ... but an instrument of love. And ... feel very strongly about this based on the fact that my father used his hands a lot to slap you .. or slug you ... or hit you. (pause) I can remember even in my 20's when you start developing male friendships or ... you know a group of guys standing together and one guy reaches over to just pat you on the shoulder. Where you maybe first react in a flinch or like ... you were going to get hit. <Hmm.) Sort of like a dog does with an owner that slaps it with his hands. (pause) So I look back on getting slapped or ... hit ... (pause) because of .. you know discipline, usually in anger. (pause) Those were basically the ways of touch in my family ... there wasn't much hugging or form of expression. Plus I also think that ... when you hit somebody, it's pretty hard to turn around and put your arms around them.

<So it didn't happen much in your family?> No. (pause) I also think that ... there's a violation of a relationship when ... for example you get into a fight with somebody and ... there's a big difference between a word fight and a physical fight. They almost feel like there's a boundary there. And when you cross that boundary ... you really injure that relationship. So when I hear young boys about I could beat him up, or he could beat me up ... and your son likes to ask you questions like whose toughest you or that dad ... I like to communicate back that ah ... you wouldn't want to get into that kind of situation because once you ... cross that line of physical contact in a negative way it ... it builds a bridge of .. hurt and mistrust and violation. (pause) So first of all I looked at touch from a negative standpoint. From a negative in my youth. And it took me personally a long long time to feel comfortable in ... positive touch.

<Where there specific times when positive touch started to occur for you and you felt yourself running from it or ... or I mean how did you even begin to embrace it because you obviously have a lot of positive life now in your life.>

(pause) I think it happened in marriage. (pause) And in the other way I grew up that touch with a female was sexual not ... you know .. to start to learn that touch doesn't have to be sexual. So that if you touch a male it's not a homosexual thing ... or if you touch a female it's not a ... initial opportunity to engage in intercourse. So it could be very platonic .. it could just be a warm ... so one - marriage. I see the value and enjoyment of touching. Just holding hands or ... to put your arm around .. and I think the biggest goal, the big break through would be with children. To have your own children and to see how much they enjoy jumping around and wrestling and then as they grow older it's just a natural extension of that. So I would say that ... and then the third aspect would be to be around ... um ... quality people that ... usually the touch of negative is associated with negative emotions and violence ... anger ... bitterness, resentment and positive touch is associated with calmness, control, ... gentleness and to be around control, kindness, gentleness, and I

began to see that in ... when I began to associate myself with people who had spirituality and that ... balance lie with God, with people, and with themselves. So ... when you're around those kinds of people you are attracted to the control, to the ability to handle difficult situations without flying off the handle and throwing things, and screaming, and swearing ... and ah ... then, that breeds or fosters trust ... ah .. support, encouragement, and those things lead to a pat on the back or ...

<Okay ... so as you go on I know in your family, forgiveness is a big priority - like ... it has you know, you guys don't allow resentment to build up in your family. How did that, did you see that in other people or did you guys just begin to incorporate that in your own family? Or how did that happen?>

(pause) I remember when we first got married, we talked about some little things that we wanted to see realized. And one of the things was ... we didn't want to foster bad attitudes, carry things over, keeping a scorebook on rights and wrongs. Then when we ... began to ... we didn't know where that came from. We didn't have that model. We both came from families where scores were kept, and bitterness and ... you know, my dad basically when he went off the wall and broke something a high chair, or threw something, or hit you ... (pause) he would laugh about it later on, like what a fool I was for acting so stupid you know, but never, I'm really sorry that I did that, could you forgive me (coughs) excuse me, and that only made it worse. It made you have bitterness more, because it was made ah, I don't know why I did that, there was no ownership.

<Can you remember a specific time when that happened. When he hit you, or beat you, and then later he just laughed it off. Can you remember like one situation?>

I remember one time when I was about ... 6 years old, there's probably many I could come up with but I'll give you one. My dad was out washing his car. He was very fussy about his car. It was a real nice warm day and my brother and sister and I were out in the yard. And he got his hose out and ah .. went to get his nozzle to put on the hose and he couldn't find it. And his immediate response was, one of the kids took that nozzle. And he just went absolutely ballistic. He would have hit us if we would have been close enough but we were in the yard and it was just a tirade of swearing, and storming around, and probably about 5 minutes later ... and I can still see it, I'm standing in the yard and I can see the nozzle on the windowsill on the house and it was high enough that none of us kids could have put it up there. And he saw it. (pause) And then he thought that was kind of funny you know ... because he realized that he had put it there. <And he didn't apologize or anything?> He didn't turn around and say, gee guys I'm really sorry, I __ ... <Feeling gee, I his he'd just do that or ...> No I never had those feelings I wish he would do that, it was more like ... you idiot. Why don't you grow up. (pause)

<Do you have another example of that when you got older, where you felt like maybe he should have apologized, or maybe a forgiving touch should have occurred.>

I don't think I ever had that thought of ... <Well, not necessarily then but now when you think back ...> oh I think of that all the time. I think that ah ... if he would have done those things. If he would have stopped and said, would you forgive me, I really crossed the line, I think his behaviour would have changed. I think that's, those are the steps to change that. When you ... when you start humbling yourself and turn to the other person to take ownership then you don't want to put yourself in that embarrassing situation again, that's why people are in denial because they don't want to so ... (pause) there was no tools in my mind then to deal with that.

<So they start to develop as you get married and you guys proceed with things ... um ... why don't we keep going on that line, did anything happen, or did you guys experience that in your marriage maybe you had a break ... not necessarily separated but something that came up between you and there was a breech in your relationship. And ah ... the stuff what you guys started using forgiveness there. Do you remember any specific examples in the beginning of the marriage. A time like when that might have occurred?>

I think, I think of all the things that probably it starts with a philosophy. Maybe you don't even know you're actually implementing that philosophy ... but you know, I'm much more specific now knowing when we started that philosophy back in our early marriage maybe it was just ah well we had this little talk and we decided we really wanted to have a good marriage. And too one of the ways we could have a good marriage is that we would try and resolve a dispute before we went to sleep that night. Then the second thing was that ... that both of us have high expectations of the other person and we're not willing to let the other person just get away with bad behaviour. With my dad ... I may have not liked it but there was not way I could confront him, because I'd have gotten beat for confronting him. But as an adult ... there was willingness to say in life with my wife, I don't like the way you're treating me. We agreed that before we go to sleep at night, we're going to deal with the way you treated me now. What are you going to do about it? And that sets a pattern and ah ... you know ... I can remember some arguments in our early marriage where one of us wasn't pleasing one another, I know one time I promised that I would be home at 4:00 to let one of her best friends in and she wasn't going to be home from teaching until about 5:30. And the friend came about 4:00 and I wasn't home yet and I hadn't cleaned up the cereal from breakfast, and the kitty had come up and knocked the cereal over and there were cornflakes all over the floor so when ah ... when Joshua had to wait in the cold until my wife got home and ah ... I did not meet a happy situation and there had to be restitution there was ... it was not going to go away until we had some ... you know I had sought forgiveness and kind of given some assurances that things would get better.

<Do you remember that, the time of going to her and saying hey, I'm ... what were you going to say, go ahead take it ... >

Yeah I apologized to her friend. <Right there, where were you guys, what was the room ...> Well I came home and ah ... they were there and ... <Where were they at?> They were probably at the kitchen table as I remember we had a small apartment, two room apartment. I came in and you realize that, hey I'm in trouble, and the whole scene comes back. You didn't do what you were supposed to do. And I said Penny I'm really sorry I did this. Hmm Suzie had asked me to have everything ready, and I told her I would ... and the pluses were number one that ... it didn't make Suzie look irresponsible. I took the ... load for being irresponsible. (pause) And I asked Suzie to forgive me, and you have a right to be upset ... (pause) So that was ... <And she offered forgiveness right there?> Yeah, but we didn't ... kind of hold each other, it turned into more of a ... I've been teased about that for 30 years now. <Do you remember after the friend left did you talk about it some more or ... > Yeah, and then, you know maybe the next time it happens I hope you won't do what you did last time. No, no I won't I'll be better this time (laughs).

<Did you, and you may not remember this anyways, but at some point, did you guys probably got together to go to sleep that night. Do you remember tensions being there, or do you think it was released at some point or ...>

That was a pretty serious offence in that early marriage ... so ... it may have taken a couple of days for my wife to get over that ... because she had invited this friend over for dinner, and she wanted it to be a good experience. She warned me and ... you know, asked me to do a pretty minor thing and ah ... one, you know one that, you might want this one. I

remember when ... my daughter Jessica, (coughs) excuse me, was about 18 months old, I had disciplined her in anger and ah ... usually I would, when she did something wrong I would be very calm, tender but firm and this is what discipline is but ah ... I hadn't done it the way I thought I should and ah ... part of me said, well she's only 18 months old she doesn't know the difference, the other part of me said, well you need to ask forgiveness. So I picked her up and ... asked her to forgive me for being angry. <So could you take me, so if I was in the room, was she on the floor or ... when you picked her up or ...> Yeah we were living in an apartment and it was afternoon or early evening .. and she was doing something that I didn't want to do and I spoke harshly - angrily and ... I think I might have pushed her aside to get away from whatever I wanted her to get away from and ... she had a real hurt look on her face and at that point I realized I was being kind of like my dad. And not nearly that aggressive, but ... I sat down and I ... I believe with little kids you should be on the same level ... your face about the same height and ... so I brought her up to me and I said well, <picked her up in both hands> yeah, picked her up, put my arms around her, held her face maybe 6 to 8 ... maybe 10 inches away from my face ... she looked directly at me and I said ... Jessica, I'm really sorry I was angry with you and __ would you please forgive me. I was wrong. (pause) And she didn't say anything. Her vocabulary wasn't ... (laughs) big at that time, she just put both arms around my neck and gave me a hug. And ... that was a special touch in that ... the ... the things I sort of remember about it, was wow at 18 months you really understand and you received the forgiveness and it took a very painful, you know situation on her part and my part into a very positive. <If that touch that she gave you, that hug there could say anything to you what do you think it would say?> That I really love you. And I ... trust you. (long pause) <As you go on can you think of any other examples of that, of a daughter or son or ... wife> Be specific? <Yeah where you can take me to the situation and tell me what happened that led to a breech and how it was resolved.>

Well, one of the most powerful I've had with my son happened last year after our camp and ... ah ... his characteristics are he's quiet. He's not very ... verbal and he's kind and ... not aggressive. Those kind of attributes don't do very well on a basketball court so as his coach we've been working on him becoming more aggressive. And he's becoming more aggressive and sometimes when you do that, you go over the line. (pause) That week in camp he went over the line a couple of times with a couple of real aggressive kids and there was some discipline involved and I wanted to be careful not to discipline him too much but I remember specifically that ... he had an altercation with this one kid and I said tomorrow when we play that kid is probably going to come after you again, and I want you to play real aggressive but I do not want you to ... respond to his verbal taunting and get into a shouting match and so forth. That's my goal and my expectation as your coach and that didn't happen and so I disciplined him. <Do you remember what the discipline was?> Sit on the bench ... think about it for a while. I spoke to him that the one expectation I had was that you ... not to respond ... or to retaliate ... and I was real disappointed that you choose that. (pause) So anyways, on the way home, it was a great week and every boy on the team except my son was real verbal and ... in their appreciation and communication to me about their week and ... there were hugs and ... we just had a great week talk as a team at this camp ... but my son didn't want to communicate and he didn't want to talk about the week. And he was very verbal with his team mates and nobody else. So ... as I tried to communicate with him on the way home ... he didn't want to communicate. (pause) And I wanted to talk about the process of the week and some of the things he did real well .. and some of the things we wanted to work on. You know, I wanted especially deal with this player/coach relationship ... junior high boys and lots of times it's very difficult for them to play for their dads. And maybe it be better, if he didn't have me as his coach ... if he had another person because there's a lot of other issues and ... I ... was communicating to him is my relationship - the most important things was not that I coached him ... and I wasn't getting anywhere. And there was a defiance there. And there was also some ... it also

carried over into his relationship with his mother where he wasn't communicating with his mom. So she was feeling some of this frustration. So as we got home, this was going no where it was getting worse - there was a period of silence. So when we got to the house I said, our unity is more important than the other factors ... getting along so I feel that the coaching/player relationship has undermined that so ... I'm not going to coach your team anymore until we get this resolved. And if we can't get this resolved, then I will not coach. So ... you need to think about what we've said and when you're ready to talk, we'll talk but as of now, I'm no longer your coach. (pause) And I didn't know if that would take a day, or a week, or it would just end there. And about an hour later he came in and asked me if we could talk. And we sat down and .... he shared his feelings. One that he really wanted me to stay as a coach. he realized that he needed to talk more, and he looked at me and asked me to forgive him for his attitude and ... he just kind of ... I was sitting down and he just sort of crumpled into my arms and just ... for a 14 year old boy to cry that hard ... to sob that much ... to tell me how much he loved me and how much he liked me being a coach it just ... please don't quit ... I'll try harder to talk more and tell me what he was feeling and so forth. It was powerful. I think in all my days of being his father it was probably the most intense display of his love for me. His appreciation and ... I think it was a real building thing for this year because we've had a phenomenal year and many many times he still ... he will let me know how much he's enjoyed our friendship. All the wonderful things we've done as a father and son ... <Where were you at when he came to you talk?> I was in this room right here. I was sitting right here where I'm sitting. <And he was standing?...> He was sitting over in that chair right there. We were sitting in two chairs about 6 feet apart. <Hmm. And then he spoke and related to you some of the issues that were important and then he asked forgiveness. Did he actually get up and came to you?> Yeah he came over to me. <And did he ... like he got up, what exactly was the situation, like what were the words ....> The more I think about it I think he was sitting on the coach and we were on the same coach so we were about 3 feet apart. And so he had to literally move about 3 feet and it was kind of a mutual coming together. <And then he ...> And I can't remember the exact words <That's okay, but he said something about forgiveness.> I'm really sorry dad ... I should have treated you better. I should have talked to you more. I will include you in my life. <And then you kind of mutually came together? Where were you, like how did you hold him, what was it like ...> I had my arms around him and he had his head on me ... on my chest. You know, he doesn't like to cry, like you don't see him cry very often. (pause) So it was a rare situation. <And he sobbed there as you held him.> Yeah, he cried for a long time. <And you just held him. (pause) That touch say anything to you about kids.> (pause) I think a lot of kids would like to do that with their dad. (pause) __ ... it's a very precious time. (pause) I think he'll have a good memory of it but that this was powerful. It was as meaningful to him as it was to me.

EXCERPT FROM SARAH, INTERVIEW #1, BEGINNING SECTION

(after preliminary collection of background data and description of the forgiving touch)

I have two... (problems with tape recorder)...The first situation that I recall was my relationship with my Mom. My mom is an adopted mom, at the time when I was eighteen and she played a very significant role in my life and in helping me feel and be a real adult. Um, and the situation that I think there was touch and forgiveness was, um, shortly after I was married, my husband's family, um... I felt quite distant, um, from and quite excluded and I was having a lot of trouble because Blake's brother was getting married and there were a lot of things that really shone the light about how I was definitely the odd person out. And my mom came to visit probably about three weeks before the wedding and there had been a shower for Mark's wife and I had been not invited <hm> and found out through

my mother-in-law that everybody else had been invited, and I was very hurt by that. And my mom and I had gone shopping and I was quite grief-stricken by not being included <um hm> and my mom was quite angry with me <mm> and uh seemed to have a lot of needs of her own at that point in time and I wasn't necessarily as present as I think she needed me to be and um, we were driving home and, um, I was - she just said to me, um, "something's happening" and so I said to her that I was very hurt by what was happening and that it was creating feelings for my own family, my biological family, and that I was feeling isolated and alone. And at that point in time, my mom just looked at me and said, "I don't think that you could handle being happy." <Really?> And that was uncharacteristic of her in so many ways, um, but it also triggered some things that I felt were perceptions that she had of me, that I was a sad person, that I was always going to be grief stricken over the loss of my own family and uh, I perceived that she saw that, uh, you know I was unable to really, uh, enjoy the loving relationship that I had <um hm>. And I didn't see it that way, I thought from a very different vantage point, um, and wanting to belong has been a ??? , hm, she, um, - I very much challenged her at that point in time, I was quite angry and it was a very immediate anger <um hm> um, by her comment - because it had been something that she'd always ???? ???? <yeah> and I had never challenged her on it and I was very angry about her listening to my experience <um hm> um, and I didn't think it had anything to do with experiencing my happiness, it was about not belonging in my husband's family, which was fairly important to me at the time and, um, she became fairly defensive, which most people do in anger, and I, uh - we talked about it very briefly in the car as I was driving and I wasn't as focussed as I wanted to be but we came home and, uh, we were in the kitchen and um, I had been fairly clear to her about the fact that I felt very confused by her response and I felt that her perception was very old <hm> and that I felt that I had "graduated", uh, from that, and she said to me, she said, I know, she said, I know, I think I was trying to be helpful, I think I was trying to help you to see that it's really not all that significant and that you need to hope that over time, that there will be other things that will be more important to you. And she said, I really think I was just trying to ... to help you to move past it because it was so painful to see you there. And uh, and I really felt that you know there was a connection right then, that there was an opportunity to kind of talk about the hurt. Um, I don't think that she had ever seen me... it was the first time that I had ever really disagreed or challenged her and I think that uh...she's never said that again <chuckle>, which was good, because I have found myself weary at the comment, and um, and then I was just standing in the kitchen and she just came over and she hugged me and um, she said, I realize that this isn't the same for you. and she said, I realize that it took me many years to be able to not care whether or not my husband's family, uh ????? <um hm> And so I realize that there were a lot of things that were similar, um, and decided that we both really cared about family. We both had good experiences in one family and not such good experiences in the other. But it was very interesting the way that she hugged me <hm>... it was very much, um, it was very much a ???? that I had grown to rely on and trust and love.

<Do you remember the specifics about how she hugged you, like was it an embrace?>

Yeah, yeah I felt very included... I know that um....

<Were her - her arms were one hand around your head or both around your body or...>

Um, there's always a hand on your head, it was more of a, uh, cradling, <um hm> um... does that make sense? <um hm> It was more um a, a present, that she was, that she was truly there and not to judge or to fix but to allow for there to be, uh, um, you know that she could just be present with me.

<Um hm. And your response...similar, just responded, like if, what was yours like, like if...she came to you and you felt that she was present and ready for you there, what was your response to her?>

I think that I had an openness to her at that point. I think that I really felt that she was very sorry for how she had responded and that um, I believe that she was very sincere in, you know, saying, I think you're right, I have kind of rushed you,um, from the woman that I was at eighteen. I was very sad and grief-stricken, um, and I see that we have so much in our life to be joyful about <um hm> and so there, there was, it seemed to her that I was stuck on this issue and I didn't feel that I was stuck, I felt like I was just sharing my experiences being, being ??? with a family that did think I was wonderful (chuckle). <Yeah>

<Yeah, what would have kept that embrace from occurring - or what could have?>

Hm. I think neither one of us being open to um each other...that there was a wall that said I don't want, I don't want to risk.

<Hm, talk about that, risk>

Um, I don't want to risk hurt, I don't want to risk, um, I don't want to risk that you would not see me in a positive light, uh, <hm> I don't want to risk um, having to say I'm sorry... <hm, ?????> Yeah.

<When you were in the car and when there's the...well you referred to the coming together as a connection. The connection was there you said.> Um hm. <What does that say about what was before that? Maybe talk about that> Um hm. <When the connection.> Yeah. <I guess... go ahead...>

Well I think there was more of a, there was a separateness at that point in time. There was a very distinct sense of both of us having our own interpretation of what was happening and I think for me in particular, there was a point of saying, you know, I didn't have to buy into your definition of the situation, I am not prepared to dismiss my feelings at this point in time, to say that I can't have happiness. I think that this is a whole lot deeper than that and I am prepared to allow myself the opportunity to feel that, and I think that in knowing my mom ????, she has a very hard time allowing those feelings to be present, her way of coping is to find a way out of it and not have to cope with that.

<So would she - you disagreed with the assumption she had made of the situation and in that disagreement some form of separateness came about and I guess, why, what would cause that, like,> hm <you know why would it be so hurt - in the - you were obviously hurt by her statement> Um, um hm <and uh, I guess something about that, what, why would separateness come out of that statement that you disagreed with, in that type of statement?>

I think some of it had to do with the dynamics of our relationship at that time, I think that, um, I was, I think that there was, um, issues around being a respected adult that marriage brought about in a very distinct way. <Yeah> I don't think that it was, I think that my mom really grieved, even though she loves Blake <yeah> dearly, because he's brought a lot of feeling and play and laughter into my life, I think she still felt that he was a bit of an intruder <yeah, that's natural> and I think that, I think that for me, I, I felt very cold with the people I loved and being able to say how do you, how do you all live together, here? <Yeah> How do you find the rhythm that honors us and honors our relationship, things in the past and present and the future? And I think that there was some separateness just

happening in general and I think that can in some ways mark <mark the ?????> uh, that - no, I am not going to be marked by your definition, I'm going to have a life of my own. So I think that there is, um, I think there's some of that happening as well.

<Um hm. What do you think her, OK, her definition was something that uh, OK we talked about the fact that that definition was hurtful, because it didn't, you know, didn't reflect the growth that you felt that you had experienced, so what was that definition, like how did you take that on your character?
Do you know what I mean? Like your character had a certain stance> Um hm. < and then she gave you that definition that hurt Kathy. What did your character say about her definition of this? Or what was it saying about your character?>

Well I think that as a child I grew up and was told that I was very fat and I would have people, strangers, friends, colleagues, employers, use a lot of names to let me know that I didn't have a smile on my face, and so I grew very tired of that kind of situation and I didn't feel that the sadness was something that I could just put a mask over and I chose to deal with that, which was very different than what my mom has chosen to do. And um, so some of it was being able to stand up to her and say, I work on my feelings and I will not mask them in the way that you have chosen to do. Still I think that what it said to me was there was a dismissal of my feelings, which was full of old stuff, ???? nature, present day nature, but it also said that I wasn't good enough, and that's a key thing for me, and I was a very ?????? child who liked being good.

<So coming through that experience, holding your own, and having your own feelings and then having her accept you with touch and admit wrong, what did that say for your character?>

Hm, I think that it allowed me to know that I could, uh, that I could, that I could have my feelings and that it wouldn't, it wouldn't be the same result as what my mom had believed about herself - that it wouldn't destroy me, that it wouldn't, um, it would empower me rather then disempower me? And, and so it was quite contrary and very distinct from the way my mom handled it. So I think it said to me that there was some ???????in saying, I want my feelings in my life, I don't, I don't want to mask them, I don't want to push them away.

<Did it say, it say anything to you about the aspect of...the personal kind of question if, if you're good, if you were a good person, if your character was good, and then that her admitting wrong, coming to you with touch. What did that say through that aspect of your character?>

I think that just was a renewal of the relationship, you know, an affirmation of my character. <Um hm> I think that what it was was that what I want is closeness between you, uh, between us, uh, I don't want to do anything to harm you, um, <and that was coming from her?> Um hm. I don't know that it was necessarily, I don't know that I necessarily felt that she appreciated what I was saying, I think that what she was saying with her touch was that she was very concerned and that she didn't want to ??????. I don't know that I could interpret it as an affirmation of my character. <Um hm>

<OK. The relationship is obviously significant to you> Um hm. <Um, even that statement there that she wanted, she didn't want separation, she wanted a closeness and there was a renewal, word that you used. Um, I guess, why touch? You know, maybe it's obvious, in your opinion, why use touch there to make the renewal happen and to experience the connection, was another word you used, the closeness?>

Um hm, um,

<Why not look you in the eye, and keep her hands away and just say, hey I appreciate you?>

I think that's sort of how, um, I think it has, I think it has more impact ?????, I think it, I think that when we celebrate things, when we grieve things, that touch is part of making that more real, more ???? what it is that is happening. I think that it's like everything that happens we can verbally say something but when we behaviorally act on that, then people have trust in it, and my experience as a therapist is that people can say a lot of different things but it's what their behaviour and what they do, and so I think somehow that's kind of, um, um I think it's part of how we remain grounded or separate, and my mom was a very demonstrative person, she's, she's um, when we're at home, I mean, one of her greatest joys is just to be able to, you know, be physically present with us and that's not smothering, it's just there's more touch and there's more, um, you know, there's still the hugs that I enjoy, you, just get a real sense of joy ????.

< Um, why wouldn't touch take place if it was uh ??????> Um <or somebody wouldn't.>

I think that uh there's a love and intimacy that makes touch significant. I think that, um, we need a particular touch when there isn't, um, when there's a lot of trust and I think there's personal values that go along with it...

<What does the touch say about...when you two came together, when you touched there was actually, there is no difference between you.> Um hm. <What does that say to you about that relationship?>

Hm. I think for me it was a really healing kind of experience, that we could still be very close and yet have differences, um and that was, that was ?????.

<Do you do anything for the...like... OK, before the relationship there was maybe some of that, that I'm wanting to be a separate adult but I'm not sure how all this is going to all pan out, how it's going to unfold, how are we going to be able to disagree yet be strong. What did that touch signify as far as those things, I mean, what did it do with the relationship?>

Oh, OK. Um, I didn't notice anything changing other than the fact that I think both of us had kind of come to terms with what it was that had happened, that there was another very significant person in my life but there was still space for my mom. <Um hm.> I think that's probably all...<still OK for her to be as close as that?> Yeah, yeah. And um, after we had been married three years, that's true, there is a significant person in my life.

<Um, what... I don't know if you want, you know, you can choose not to go into this if you want to but, you talked about how she is a significant person to you. Um, can you talk about that more, like why is she so significant, she came into your life at age eighteen and uh, you know, what made that significant to you?>

Well it was a time in my life when I had been, um, disowned by my own family, <literally like> yeah, very much that way. I couldn't ?????, and so living in an adopted family who very much admired me, um, when they talk about it with admiration, in the sense that I was worth investing a lot of time and attention to, um, there was uh, um, there was a lot of similarity between Beth, my adoptive mom and myself, um, <How did you come to be there?> Um, actually, um they are the parents of a former boyfriend and um, I was dating Mark at the time, um, and my parents and I were having a very tumultuous time, my parents had a hard time because I chose to go into Social Services and because I chose to

become a member of the United Church, so they no longer wanted to see me and that if I ever came home, ???, and um, Les and Beth, um, were very, very responsive to me during that period of time; Mark and I were also dating then. <Um hm.> And they um said that there was enough love for both of us <Hm.> and nobody had to lose here.
<Did they verbalize that to you?>

Yeah, they said that to both of us, they sat us down at the time that we were ending our relationship and said this is something that we feel very strongly about, we feel that Kathy is a part of this family, there isn't a way of dismissing the fact that the two of you don't want to be together any longer, ???????, <Um hm.> and that we don't want to end the relationship with you, and they gave Mark the feeling ????? relationship problems and they gave him the freedom to, you know, we talked about it, we talked about the fact that for a period of time he would not want to be at home during the times that I was there and, um, that he, that I felt very strongly that he should be given priority, um, if he needed to be home and there wasn't going to be a place that I could be at, that he would have to take priority. Uh, he um, he was also very generous about allowing me to be part of the family, um, and very much, um, very much, you know, caring of me knowing my family situation, um, I think there was some relief that, that I would experience that help that I needed, and we'd become, we're very good friends and um, we're very accepting of each other's burdens and we feel we very much were family with each other, um, it's hard to imagine ???? <chuckle> Um hm. But um, the relationship was very significant because it was a family where I could be and where I had no conditions.

<And that was different from where you grew up?>

Yeah, very much.

<OK, back to the touch with your mom. Um, let's see here. Do you know, I guess how - to break down the touch itself, how would we uh - that's what I'm trying to do here, so, let's say that type of thing occurred just in a hypothetical situation. You really didn't have a chance to talk about it and a letter took place.> Um hm. <Would that be enough or would that, how would that be different than a touch or or what would happen in the touch that came after the letter?>

Um, OK. I certainly have had opportunity to learn by this. I think that the - I don't think there's as much gentleness and as much tenderness, um, I, because I think we end up having to explore, um, it's harder to have the emotion that's present, um, <present in the touch?> present in the touch but just even in that kind of space that we shared as we talked ?????

<Sorry, we're going to break off for a second here - talk about that space, like, there's a space that you were - you were there in the kitchen, there was a space, there was some->

There, there is more of that, it's hard to explain but I can also, when I think about it I experienced that with my husband as well. There is a space that is, um, there is an intimacy in that space that, that - there's something about the foundation of that relationship and I guess in my intimate relationships I don't have a sense that conflict is going to destroy. And so there is a space that happens when there is a difference or a disagreement or conflict, um ,

<But there is an underlying foundation.>

..but there's something that holds you there, that um, you can stay here and still stay.

<Um hm. What does the - so that space is happening and there is some type of difference there, and um, there may be the fear of hurt and of admitting wrong and other things like that, even in that space, so what is the nature of that space when the actual touch happens? Maybe go from that. What is it, uh, you have these disagreements and then some - something happens to cause the coming together.>

Um hm. I think - I think my experience, like I'm generalizing to a lot of different situations. I think we're at that age where there is understanding, where there is, there may not necessarily be agreement but there is an understanding of each other's actions, there's an understanding of each other thoughts.

<What kind of understanding?>

That there is, there is any malice intended, um, that there isn't um, that there is, that our, our actions are um, we're not conscious of them, that there is somehow some sense of trying to help you.

<Yeah. The understanding, trying to help, maybe go into that too - a willingness to uh ->

Yeah, a willing, uh, I'm trying to take a lot of these examples and generalize them, um...

<Let's say in that situation in the kitchen, what was the understanding?>

I think the understanding was that - I think my mom in trying to help was trying in her own way to say this isn't going to ?????? so don't get hung up on it now. Don't allow it to hurt you. And I wasn't there, I'm still not there, um, I think that you know in talking to people about their, you know in-law and the extended family that, yeah, it becomes less significant over time, but it's over time, not, it's not something that's going to be - I wasn't there yet and I think she wanted me to be there. I think for her coming to my home and observing everything that was happening in there, there was absolutely no reason for me to not have joy in my life.

EXCERPT FROM PETER, INTERVIEW #2, (PAGES 6-11)

<Why can we communicate about groceries ... and ... the sunshine and the weather, but it's a lot more difficult, the deeper things, when there's a lack of forgiveness between the two of us. Do you know what I mean? Like how come a marriage can talk about the ... why is it more difficult to get into those deep issues when you know there's a need for forgiveness between you but it hasn't occurred? (pause) In your opinion.>

Well, it's just the other things are surfacy, I mean the other things get us through life ... but ... the deeper things are what build characters. the ... I don't know why it's harder, possibly because of the fear of getting known too well (laughs). the fear of ... if .. if a person knew absolutely every thought that went through my mind ... what would they really think of me, you know? And that's probably the biggest fear is people have ... I'm afraid of getting into really deep discussion sometimes, because maybe my tongue will start to flow, and I will say something that will incriminate me ... (laughs) that will ... <Reflect poorly on your character.> Yeah - because ... people want their character to look good. They want people to love them for ... people want them to be loved for what they are, but they want to present what they are. They don't want to have people see too far deep.

<So when your character is ... looked down upon, you know like we do ... like when you went to the massage parlour. She had a right to look down on your character. And when I

make mistakes with my wife sexually or going to a video store, she has a right to look down on my character. What does Ashley's touch of forgiveness at the piano then say to your character?>

(takes breath) (pause) It says your a man. It says that ... (pause) I want to know about you. I want to know and care more about you. To me that was a huge stand of for her what she expected of a marriage. She expected me to be myself, to be me ... yet ... that embrace probably took off so many layers of guilt in my life that ... portrayed you're a man. That's the biggest thing. That's a spur of the moment thought that ... <What do you mean by that, what does your heart get out of it when you hear that you're a man from her?> Well because for me .... (pause) I want to be a leader at home. In which so many ways I'm not. In which every day to me is a struggle of ... of desiring to be ... just a man. You can be a man physically but you can be an absolute wuss if you don't take a stand on certain issues, and I know there's so many areas in my life where .. um .. I just let life flow, I let life go on. And ah ... when I say ... that embrace of forgiveness made me feel like a man, it made me feel like ... yes I can be a husband but ... and I'm not saying I am at that point, I'm just saying at that moment, that embrace made me feel like I could conquer the world. That I would .. uh .. do things, make .. build a palace of her. It made me feel like I could ... uh ... create a world for her that would make her ... proud or make her love me, even more, you know? Or that would build our relationship so strong, that nothing could break it apart.

(pause) <A lot of time in relationships we say that our relationship is growing. When a time of ... when something arises in a relationship that separates us. That a need for forgiveness arises because of something one of us has done. What happens to the growing _ in the relationship, before the forgiveness has taken place. Do you know what I mean?>

I'd say more or less come to a crawl or a stand still. <Why?> (lets breath out) I don't think there's ... I don't think true growth can happen when there's secret sins, or something that's not been .... completely out in the open in other words. I mean, how do you explain that? Just that I guess, I don't know, just you can't move on when there's stuff holding you back. How deep can you get when you know in the back of you're head there's this thing hanging over you, or whatever. How ... I mean ... (long pause) I don't know. <So what does forgiveness do to that growth process if it's halted or stopped, or held back by .. things that need to be forgiven.> How does forgiveness ... <What does forgiveness do to that part when it's it's stopped okay, the relationship is stopped and then you receive forgiveness?> It allows it to go on. I think it allows ... gives the freedom to go on after that ... <Has it changed anything from before?> The forgiveness .... <Has it changed the growth process of the relationship? You know what I mean? Like you're growing ... significant something arises to separate. You come through it together .. you have forgiveness ...> I think it grows stronger. <Why?> I mean every failure I think ... great things come from that. I think, depending on how it's reacted upon. Depending on..... how a person responds to .. an instance ... can build a relationship stronger or it can weaken it. <So Ashley's response did what to you guys?> Oh it strengthened it ... definitely ... I mean because, I think forgiveness can happen and the relationship can still go on. But depending on how the forgiveness is given and truly received and perceived, I mean like in my instance if I felt she was holding back. The growth process would have taken maybe longer ... we could still get to that point, but it would take longer. Where as I perceive true forgiveness, and one of a strong charactered woman who ... who ah .. stood behind what she was saying and .. backed it up with a physical action ... <Could you have been able to tell what she was holding back, had you touched you?> Oh yeah, you mean from the way she hugged me ... <How can we tell that?> Well ah, you just know. You can give a person a hug and just tell right away if they want to withdraw ... you can tell if their .. if their in there and you're all of a sudden the person realizing, man we've been

hugging a long time ... um .. maybe that's all, but yet the hug is still there. And it's strong. And it's not withdrawing in any way like its ... when you hug your mom, you hug her for a few seconds and then you depart, (laughs) separate ... when you .. , well that's a bad example. (pause) When you hug a guy friend, two guys hugging, it's not a natural thing to stay hugging for a long time (laughs) so ... the one person, who ever feels less comfortable with that hug, would be pulling away first. So when there's a forgiveness and when it's ... it's a forgiveness, but there's still a hint of - I'm ticked at you for doing that but I forgive you, I think you would notice it instantly in the response of a hug or .. it would be a shorter hug, or ... colder, or not quite as warm of an embrace. <So there is some element of residing there anger at you in a a true forgiveness touch .. is that true?> Say that again. <Like when she embraces you, you could tell if she was still harbouring anger against you?> Yeah. <But one of the elements that made it true forgiveness for you was that you felt she was not harbouring any resentment> Because ... I think she handled it wisely, even though it scared me for her to take time away from me, I think that was the wisest thing. And I think I knew that at that time, it was just hard to ... to accept it, I knew it was right because ... (pause) you know, it's a person's life, we both knew that marriage was in the future and I think we both knew that this was a decision that had to be made and had to be dissolved in order for the relationship to move on. And if .... if time wasn't taken away from each other, you know, ... this issue had to be dealt with and ... I think she handled it very wisely and just taking time away, and spending time in prayer, and just ... evaluating her own heart and what her feelings were ... and her true character came out. And I mean, she could have ... she could have come back and I believe she could have forgiven me and not continued the relationship. And I think that process could have happened as well, and that wouldn't have necessarily been wrong. But she choose to ... stick it out with me and to ah ... ah ... in essence give me a second chance and .... we took it from there.

<She came to you, she offered forgiveness - the embrace. What did that do for ... your ability to share ... other past painful things in your life. Or even future painful things in your life?>
It definitely opened it up. I mean it definitely opened up the opportunity to share ... uh ... but when things arise even now, it's still difficult. I think the sad thing is that over the years, and I don't know if this is for everybody, but it seems you get ..... (phone rings)

<So we were talking about ... it opened up the opportunity to share hurts, other hurts from the past in your life as well as future hurts, but then you went on to say ...> Yeah, I think it definitely gave me more freedom to talk about things but I think even today ... just the ... human nature, it's still hard to talk about a person's failure, and faults. <It's not an easy thing to proclaim your own guilt> Because you're incriminating yourself, and that's a hard thing to ... yeah - that's a hard thing to deal with but I think what's harder for me is the pain I put her through. And if only ... I could think about that pain before a person failed. If you .. if you could really engrave in a person's head that the pain that God feels when his children fail and .. the people that you truly love ... if you knew the pain that you're putting them through as well, I don't think we'd sin nearly as much, or fail. I think we would fight it, and fight it. Or go to them and say, look I'm dealing with this right now ... I'm harbouring these feelings, or whatever, and I don't want to fail, can you help me with this. I think that would ... obviously be the wiser thing to do. Especially when one is a husband/wife issue of sexual things like that. To work together to get something organized to where there's that freedom - but then there's always the case where there isn't that freedom to do something, because maybe there's miles between you or there's ... you know, you're by yourself or whatever. There's always those cases where you have to fight it in your own head and work that through. (pause)

<What ah ... her forgiveness, her embracing you fully - not holding back. What kind of desire did that give you as far as ... future action.> It made me desire to never do it again. (pause) <Because why?> Well ... because of the pain I put her through. Because of the pain I went through ... that separation time. Um ... (pause) probably mainly not ever wanting to put her through that again. And especially the devestation now that we're married. Um ... you know. (pause) That would be ah ... I think it would be a more difficult thing now. It would be hard to put a level on that as to whether or not it would be more difficult now, as opposed to then, but I think it would be more difficult now, because there's been years of intimacy to where at that point there wasn't. Cause ... we didn't have sex before marraiged ... so I think now .. it would obviously be a lot more terrible. But I think that that whole instance of ... every time now I've thought of ... (tape ends)

<You were saying the thought of that now ... instantly .. say that again>

Uh ... just ... the ... the thought of ... ever going to a massage parlour or whatever it may be, suddenly brings back memory of that. <What is the thought of her ... touching you in true forgiveness, what memory does that bring?> (pause) I don't know, it's probably the truest form of love that I can think of (laughs). Because I ... I was ... I mean ... it was a beautiful moment because of ... uh ... I mean we can experience, we can be told that we're loved, and we can be ... and we can even have I think in many ways have ... love through touching and love in affectionate ways .. but when a person has failed and uh .. there's an embrace. the embrace I think is multiplied in ah ... huge numbers just because of the fact of acceptance and ... yes you're forgiven but there's almost a peace like a "whew" (laughs) - relieved, the burden is taken off you. And ah .... (pause) that would be .. the best way to say that.

<That's great. What would be the difference between Ashley coming back you know, she's said she's thought about this, she decided this ... (phone rings) Okay, sorry about the interruption. Okay ... Ashley comes to you, she offers forgiveness, the touch of forgiveness there. Would you ... what's the difference , would you .. .what's the difference or, what if she had decided to write you a letter from her house. She writes you a letter and it's beautiful, she offers forgiveness, she's ready to start again. Why touch - is touch necessary, what does it do I guess?>

It brings you close. She also proves that there's no separation. A letter is beautiful. A letter is nice in many ways, I mean ... uh .. one at that point she would know that I probably wouldn't want to receive a letter because I didn't at that point in my life I didn't do any reading. So she knows at that area in my life ... maybe that doesn't really mean a whole lot ... words can be beautiful ... words ... words of the most beautiful writers in the world can mean lots - but it only means as much as the person receiving it understands it or ... I think ... <Do we understand touch better than words?> Oh yeah. (phone rings) Hugely, just because of the fact that words ... that person .. which arises another question is it not possible that a person can write something .. on a page of absolute joy and beauty and be crying say while he's writing it. (background noise) I mean .. if that's the case well then the person writing something could be writing something beautiful and yet be crying and experiencing pain and not express it fully on paper. You know ... touch expresses feelings without words. (pause) True affection ... true ... true touch ... speaks way more volumes I think than any word can express because you don't have to say anything to express it. You know what I mean, like you can .. can be in the middle of a .. I don't know, you can .. be in a hectic day and ... you rushing around the world, rushing all over the place, and all of a sudden think to yourself - man I love my wife. And without saying a word just reach over and touch her and grasp her hand, and look in her eyes and not a word is exchanged but you can just ... or have a moment of embrace ... that instance, I mean it's almost like, don't say a word (laughs) you don't want to break that moment,

you don't want to wreck it by saying something foolish, you want to embrace and enjoy the moment of touch because it speaks volumes of I love you, it speaks volumes of any I mean it basically the most beautiful writer in the world could write a love story through that embrace because with you know, and even though the two people embracing never said a word. You know you could think of the ocean, you could think of something beautiful, but to me, not a word has to be said. <That's nice. So let's say she wrote you a letter. Would the touch still have to occur at some point?> Uh-huh because I mean you could have a letter and it comes by .. mail and ... or whatever, even if it came hand in hand, it doesn't matter, there always has to be a point of embrace to feel that forgiveness. To see if it's real.

<How is lack of forgiveness ... let's say, say she had done something to you. She asks forgiveness, you said no, how is that selfishness or is it. I mean in some cases I can see it not being, let's say like sexual abuse or something. I mean let's say it's not you two, not something that's taken place, just something that's logically in your power to forgive but you choose not to ... how is that selfishness?>

Selfishness on my part? Oh man .. I want to instill in my wife the freedom to fail. Because without that I don't believe there's meaning. I mean she might as well be a robot. I want her to feel, to live life not totally recklessly but I want her to enjoy life and to life live life, not afraid that if she were to fail at something or hurt me that she has lost the world. You know I want her to feel that she can live life, take risks, make decisions .. on her own or with me or whatever in such a way that even if it's a wrong decision that it doesn't matter, she'll still be loved me me, I mean if I take that right to not forgive in a certain case ... I've taken away her freedom. I've taken away ... well it's hugely selfish just because in one act of forgiveness there can be peace and there can be communication and you know there's no break down of that growth of marriage. But ... uh ... if .... <That's good. Um ... how does forgiveness lead to deeper intimacy?>

(pause) Um .. probably just ... (pause) how does forgiveness lead to intimacy ... <or to deeper intimacy> (pause) <like in your life with Ashley, how did that moment when she forgave you and touch you, how did that lead you into deeper intimacy?> Well .... probably just the fact that I knew that she knew about my past. And about my life in such a way that .. uh ... except I'm not heading down the right trail here, you know the forgiveness part ... um ... I knew I was forgiven, I knew that there was an avenue for her to love me for who I was and that ... I mean, I was afraid to fail, mainly because ... I didn't want to put her through that again. But I knew that if I ever did ... that ... um ... that she wouldn't just ... say take off, take a hike, you know so I think that allowed us to grow deeper, allowed us to build a stronger relationship to the point where we could share anything. <How much did she know about your past life?> (pause) I think she'll learn a lot more from these tapes (laughs) Possibly .. but ... <Did she know about the prostitution, things like that?> Well, at that point .. I don't ... it's hard to remember. <But there came a point ...> There came a point that yup, and I did tell her. <Do you remember that time?> It could have even been that time when I told her about that. Yeah I do believe I did tell her that I wasn't a virgin and ... that was a hard thing to tell. (long pause) Those are moments that ... a person hates to tell their weaknesses. A person hates to have to admit that their wrong ... but ... I think it's necessary and it's justice I mean it's way more necessary in God, God has created a world in such a way that the way we react to our husbands and wives is .. in admitting that we're wrong in those areas and to allow ourselves to receive tha. forgiveness is the same ... instance that God, we have to admit that we're sinners, and that's the ... <To allow us to have what sort of relationship?> It allows us to have ... an eternal relationship, but I mean it allows us to have that freedom with Him to experience that forgiveness that He gives. To experience that grace. Without that whole experience between God ... I mean who is .. always .. you know always been

omni-present .. or maybe that's not the right word. But I mean for God who has always been to ... who has shown us that grace without that whole experience without that, without God .. .our world would be horrendous because we wouldn't experience grace, we wouldn't experience forgiveness. I mean I don't think without that example of God ... who ... giving of us own son and that, to die on the cross for us, the ultimate gift of forgiveness for our sins of ... know what I mean just that compassion to die on the cross for us so that we could have eternal life. In other words when we ask for forgiveness, without that example, I question as to whether or not .. that forgiveness would be evident in people's lives.

<So when you felt that ... knew it in the touch of Ashley, what did it tell you about God, and your relationship with God, or Ashley or ....>

Well I mean I felt a lot more secure. More like ... more relieved that ... there weren't any more secrets ... that she knew me. <She knew you. Even the darkest parts of you.> Which was important for me. The good, the bad the ugly. Have to ... like you have to know everything. I mean it's scary .. when marriages occur ... I mean ... I mean I guess I don't, you don't know how much a person should divulge I mean there's I guess there are some details that just plain old aren't necessary to talk about. But I think the act of .. the issues, are so important to talk about because whether it's bad or whatever ... just because it's necessary, because you will never grow in that relationship with out it. I think for Ashley and I ... it showed me ... that she was truly the one I was to marry because of ... the character that she had, that she expressed, the willingness to take time to think about it and not react in such a way. And the willingness to forgive the willingness to say ... let's work together in this and let's move on, and we can't forget it ... never I mean ... man I've seen other women ... uh ... go through issues like that and yes .. give forgiveness. But yet, Ashley is ... I mean ... she's just a strong character in the sense of I don't know, strong willed, strong person in the sense that ... she wasn't about ... she may feel pain inside and she may ... uh ... be hurting ... even though the forgiveness was given and it may be a later date and a memory arises about what that old issue was and she may feel pain but she won't ... uh ... allow her ... person to express it. So that .. and this is the way I receive it is that ... if she were to allow herself to show her rememory or not that she should hide it because there are many times that we talk about it of there still being scaring feelings, or scared thoughts of what could happen, even though we had talks like that, but she would never show it in such a way that would make me feel that .. ah .. that I hadn't been forgiven on that day, you know, because, I mean even though there were times and .. times even to this day that I even feel guilt, but that's not because of her, that's because of me and what goes on in my head.

<What ... what are we seeking when we touch in forgiveness. Like, when you go reaching for her and wanting that full touch, what are you seeking from her?> Acceptance. (pause) Closeness ... I mean. If you're sitting across the table from someone asking forgiveness. It's almost confirmed by a touch, you know because, there's a longing in your heart, there's something that says something in yourself that .. without it .. without that touch you're missing something, you're missing ... the true gift of forgiveness. I mean ... um .... you're longing for it because with out it, you just don't feel totally forgiven. It's like it has to happen to complete the gift. <What are we giving when we give that touch. First of all let's say you're in Ashley's position, or you're giving it to Ashley. Somebody's done you wrong, and you give them a touch.> You're giving of yourself, your giving of you're selfishness. I think Ashley had every right to just say, take a hike, she had been wronged. And ... she had been in ... like I mean not physically, but she had been mistreated by me, and I was disrespectful to her as a human being, as a girlfriend at that point, and as a future wife. I had ... (pause) I mean that's ... in some people's eyes the unpardonable sin. So I mean she had every right to ... hold that

forgiveness but yet she gave it so her gift was herself, she was giving of herself, and I think she was giving of a peace of God. By giving forgiveness she was giving a piece of herself. She was giving of her character by saying I forgive you and saying I'm not going to withdraw myself from you, I'm giving myself and let's grow deeper in our friendship, our relationship. She was giving me a second chance. You know she was giving me a breath to breathe, she was giving me a life, you know just by giving me herself, she was reaching out and giving me a hug, giving me to heal, giving me the ability to sort of take another step from there.

<Beautiful.>

APPENDIX E

PARTICIPANT COMMENTS

NAME:

DATE:

1. What was it like for you to speak with me about your experiences of touch and forgiveness?

2. Have your thoughts, goals, desires, or actions changed in any way due to your taking part in this study? In other words, has participation in this study had an impact on you? Be as specific a possible.

3. If you were telling someone else who had experienced touch in forgiveness about taking part in this study, would you recommend that he or she participate? Why or why not?

4. In reflecting on your participation in this study do you have any further suggestions, ideas for improving the study, or comments?

5. Would you like a copy of the complete research report? Please circle one.

Yes No

** Adapted from Clark, G. (1993). *Personal meanings of grief and bereavement.* Doctoral dissertation. University of Alberta. Edmonton, Alberta, Canada.